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TORONTO

ROBESPIERRE

FIRST MODERN DICTATOR

BY

RALPH KORNGOLD

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1937

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TO
DR. F. SZPER

FOREWORD

HALF a century ago, Hippolyte Taine wrote concerning Robespierre: "After a hundred years he still makes dupes". Since then the number of Robespierre's partisans has greatly increased. Reims and Arras have named streets after him, and the latter city has erected a monument in his honour. In Sicard's monument to the Convention, in the Panthéon in Paris, he occupies the foremost place. Modern French historians are far less critical of him than their colleagues in the past. Some, like Mathiez, Lefebvre and Pariset, are frank admirers.

The author confesses to a certain sympathy with Robespierre when he began intensive study of his subject. This sympathy, curiously enough, was first aroused by reading Thiers' *Histoire de la Révolution française*. Thiers wrote his history in the early part of the 19th century, and could hardly have foreseen that some two score years later he would have the opportunity of demonstrating those same qualities of moderation and mercy for the supposed lack of which he so severely criticized Robespierre. Now, the author had done considerable reading about the Paris Commune, hence knew that in 1871, Thiers' military tribunals had within a few weeks and with considerably less ceremony than Robespierre proposed in his famous Law of Prairial, despatched as many unfortunates as had the Revolutionary Tribunal of Paris and all the bloody proconsuls combined during the entire Reign of Terror! ¹

According to General Appert, Chief of the Military Tribunal, the number of executions following the Paris Commune was 17,000. Unofficial figures give almost double that number. The

It became clear to the author that it was all a question of whose ox was being gored. The Red Terror appears unpardonable to the Whites, and the White Terror to the Reds. Carlyle penetrates very closely to the truth when he says that the reason the Reign of Terror under the French Revolution has received so much scathing comment, is mainly because it was directed against the privileged classes and their followers and not against "the voiceless millions".

It has always seemed to the author somewhat presumptuous on the part of sheltered individuals to set themselves up as implacable judges over a man at grips with such cataclysmic events and forces as Robespierre had to face. The righteous critic would do well to ask himself in all humility what under like circumstances his own conduct might have been. Had Thiers done so, his judgment would not have recoiled upon him. In truth, few of us can be really sure how we would act if great power were given into our hands under extraordinary circumstances. Some of the most atrocious and arbitrary acts of the French Revolution were perpetrated by men who gave no indication whatever of being especially bloodthirsty or arbitrary. Fréron was beloved by his friends. Fouquier-Tinville was a model husband and father. Nothing in Carrier's career indicated that he would turn a city into a shambles. Robespierre, on the other hand, showed on many occasions a mercy, self-restraint and courage some of his critics might not have been able to imitate.

The author, while not abstaining from criticism, has, therefore, approached his subject with a desire to understand and interpret rather than to criticize and condemn.

most reliable estimates of the executions under the Reign of Terror, in Paris and the provinces, vary between 18,000 to 20,000, which includes the 3000 victims of Carrier's *noyades*.

FOREWORD

Whenever doubt was possible, he has given Robespierre—whom nearly all historians concede to have been sincere—the benefit of the doubt. When praise seemed to be merited, he has not given it grudgingly or apologetically.

He has not been merely interested in Robespierre's personality and character, but also, and especially, in the peculiar position he occupied as leader of the Fourth Estate. The struggle between Aristocrats, Patriots, Feuillants, Constitutionals, Girondins, Montagnards, Jacobins, Cordeliers, Dantonists, Robespierrists, Enragés, Hébertists, etc., was, at bottom, not a struggle between groups of ambitious individuals and their followers, but the effort of society to find its political equilibrium after the shifting of great economic forces. Individual ambitions undoubtedly played a part, but to try to interpret the events of the Revolution by them, is like trying to explain a flood by the jostling of craft borne upon the rushing waters.

No one man creates a revolution or carries it on, but the currents of revolution may sometimes range themselves in such a manner that the fate of one man becomes the fate of the revolution itself. "We did not realize", said Cambon, "that in killing Robespierre we would kill the Republic." The majority of historians consider the French Revolution ended with Robespierre's fall, and so it was. Society had found its temporary political equilibrium, or nearly so. His skilful leadership had made the working classes far more important politically than their economic position justified. He himself realized this, and in the Laws of Ventôse he tried to give the Fourth Estate a firmer economic footing. The attempt failed, and his fall inevitably followed.

RALPH KORNGOLD

PARIS, 1932-33.

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PART I

CHAPTER ONE

THE STUDENT

I

LOUIS XVI had been crowned in Reims. Holy oil had been poured upon his bowed head and he had been proclaimed King of France and Navarre. It was thought fitting that before returning to his palace at Versailles, he should make his devotions at some of the principal shrines of the largest city of his realm. So he proceeded to Paris in great state and attended pontifical Mass at Notre-Dame.

This over, the procession ascended the gentle slope towards the Church of Ste. Geneviève, Patron Saint of Paris. The route led past the great university, and it had been arranged that a stop should be made at the College of Louis-le-Grand, where suitable addresses of welcome and expressions of hope for a long and blessed reign would be delivered in faultless Latin by the university authorities. And so, a little while later, the portly Louis sat in a state chair at the college in the Rue St. Jacques, looking like some fat and magnificent idol, and received the homage of the high priests of learning. When they had finished there stepped forward, according to custom, one of the students, who read a Latin speech purported to voice the sentiments of the student body. He was a slim youth of seventeen, small for his age, with a pale, sharp-featured face. He had written the

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speech himself, and it is claimed that as originally conceived it had in it much of protest against the then existing state of society. This is not improbable, for he had recently read Rousseau and at his age would hardly have overlooked such an opportunity to air his newly acquired ideas. But whatever its original content, his teacher of Latin and of rhetoric, Hérivaux, had seen to it that it contained no heresies when finally it reached the ear of the monarch.

Alas for the hapless Louis! There would be no Hérivaux to censure the speech which this same youth, become a man, would read some seventeen years later to the Convention, when in bitter language he would demand the head of this King without even the formality of a trial. But alas also for this youth, whom Hérivaux called the "Roman": when eighteen months more would have rolled by he himself was to mount the scaffold. As he stoically bowed to destiny, he perhaps remembered the scene it had pleased Fate to stage as a fitting prelude to his career.

The youth's name was Maximilien Maria Isidore de Robespierre.

II

He was born in Arras, in the Province of Artois, on the 6th of May 1758, and was baptized in the Church of Ste. Madeleine. The house in which he was born has never been identified. The birth is said to have taken place at two o'clock in the afternoon, when Saturn rises above the eastern horizon, a portent of disaster, according to astrologers. The baptismal entry reads "Derobespierre". This was the spelling his grandfather had adopted and his father continued. He, himself, meticulous in all things and perhaps not indifferent to the possibility of the noble descent the name implied,

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restored the old spelling. When, in 1790, the Constituent Assembly abolished titles and outward symbols thereof, he dropped the preposition.

It is unlikely that he was of noble descent. There exists a document, dated at Lille in 1397, in which one of his ancestors, Bloquelle de Robespierre, an archer in the army of the Duke of Burgandy, is mentioned on equal terms with some of the noblest in Flanders, but this, according to competent authority, is not *prima facie* evidence of nobility. The use of the preposition before the family name is even less so: it was a conceit much in vogue among people of social aspirations and had no special significance. Robespierre's grandfather made use of an escutcheon, which, however, originated with the latter's uncle, Yves de Robespierre, who registered it in 1696 with the Heralds' College, under a decree, issued by Louis XIV, allowing "*des gens d'honneur et de distinction*" to acquire such an ornament by means of a contribution to the royal exchequer.

About the middle of the 16th century, one Robert de Robespierre was engaged in the city of Lens in the honourable, but hardly knightly pursuit of selling "candles and torches, wine and bread for use of the Mass". One of his sons—likewise named Robert—received a good education and became court clerk in the town of Harnes. In 1661, he was named Royal Notary and Procurator of the Principality of Epinoy, of which Carvin, a small town twelve miles from Arras, was the capital. He was succeeded in the notarial calling by a son—again named Robert—who was lieutenant of the principality and married the daughter of a local doctor and magistrate. It was their eldest son, Yves, who furnished the family with an escutcheon, while a younger offspring, Martin, married the daughter of the postmaster and keeper of chaise horses and begot Maximilien

Barthélemy, Robespierre's grandfather, who moved to Arras and changed the orthography of the family name.

It will be seen from the above that there is no foundation for the claim, made by some, that the family came from Ireland, fugitives from the persecution of Catholics under the reign of Henry VIII or Edward VI, and that the name was originally Robertspeare; or that they descended from an English or Scotch ancestor called Robert's Peter. The name—with the spelling of which members of the family and others took various liberties—is undoubtedly a combination of the two given names *Robert* and *Pierre*, which frequently recur in the Robespierre genealogy. It is likewise clear that if not a noble, Robespierre was at least descended from an old and honourable family of considerable social standing.

III

Maximilien Barthélemy Derobespierre came to Arras in 1720. The city is in French Flanders. The country round about is flat, wide-horized. There is a placid river, the Scarpe. Some of Robespierre's biographers have spoken of the influence of this landscape upon his character. Men not infrequently bear the imprint of their natural surroundings, but there is little that identifies Robespierre with these fat Flanders' fields. If their monotony be associated with his austerity, then it must be pointed out that their fertility has usually stood for voluptuousness. There is, however, in Flanders a marked Spanish strain, and one cannot help speculating whether some of this did not enter into the composition of his character. Something in the cold, hard passion of the man suggests the country of fierce contrasts beyond the Pyrenees.

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Robespierre's grandfather settled in Arras with the intention of practising law. He was a good lawyer and a well-anchored citizen in every way, and soon developed a lucrative practice, besides gaining the respect of his fellow townsmen. He had a son, François Derobespierre, who from childhood showed quite different characteristics from his father. He was a dreamer, impulsive, easily torn from his moorings. His parents, conscious of his weakness, decided that he should become a monk, and at seventeen he entered the Abbey of Dommartin, in Ponthieu, as a novice. But he was not destined to spend his days in heeding the summons of the cloister bell. When it was time for him to take the vows, he rebelled, saying he felt no calling for the monastic life and had only wished to please his parents. In the course of time he likewise became a lawyer.

At twenty-six he met pretty Jacqueline Marguerite Carrault. She was not of his social standing, being the daughter of a small brewer in the suburb of Rouxville, but when it became apparent that she would soon be a mother, he married her, after a single calling of the banns. Neither his father, nor any other member of the family attended the ceremony. Four months later Robespierre was born, and the old lawyer, having reconciled himself to the situation, became the godfather.

Robespierre's parents were reasonably happy, but not over-prosperous. Children came in rapid succession—Charlotte, Henriette, Augustin. When Jacqueline was but twenty-six, her fifth child was stillborn and she herself died a few days later.

Her death uncovered the flaw in her husband's character. All energy and sense of responsibility seemed to desert him. He neglected his practice, wandered about the country or sat moodily in a tavern. A friend recommended travel, and he left, no doubt with the

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intention of soon returning. He wandered aimlessly through Belgium, Germany and England. Once he came home, but only to realize poignantly that he was a failure and without a fixed place in society. He borrowed some money from one of his sisters and departed again. For a while he is said to have conducted a school in Cologne. Three years after his first departure, word came of his death in Munich.

IV

When the father left Arras, the household was broken up. The grandfather having likewise died, two maiden aunts, sisters of Robespierre's father, took charge of the girls, while the Carraults undertook the care of the boys. The two girls were sent to a convent school at Tournai—a semi-charitable institution, requiring the payment of only 130 Dutch florins for nine years' board, lodging and tuition. Robespierre was already attending the College of Arras.

When his mother died he was not yet seven, too young to be greatly affected, but his father's death threw a shadow over him. He became silent, self-absorbed. The thought of that lonely death and dislocated life seemed to haunt him. His attitude towards his little brother and sisters became almost paternal, as if he felt that being the eldest, some of the responsibility devolved upon him.

The Carrault house had a garden, and he was allowed to put up dovecots and keep pigeons. Sometimes he would occupy himself with the making of lace, an art his mother taught him and in which he was proficient even at five. He liked to build little chapels and to collect pictures. On Sunday the children would always be reunited, and he would exhibit his pigeons, placing

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bird after bird carefully in his sisters' hands. They begged him to give them one, but for a long time he was not to be persuaded, fearing they might neglect it. Finally, however, he parted with one of his pets, giving many injunctions regarding its care. The little girls meant well, but one night left the pigeon out in a storm, and in the morning it was found dead. As a very old woman Charlotte remembered this childhood tragedy and Maximilien's bitter tears.

Little more is known about his childhood in Arras. Charlotte, in her memoirs, makes him out a model child; others, not unprejudiced, picture him as sullen, domineering and impatient of criticism. Later, when he was at school in Paris, a woman from Arras, whose son attended the same institution, wrote to the principal that she did not want her boy to associate with Robespierre, which may have been due to the latter's iconoclastic turn of mind.

V

There was in Arras a great abbey, called the Abbey of St. Waast. It was a city within a city, huge, walled, turreted, medieval. The abbot was a great lord, with more power than the bishop, and lived in a palace within the abbey walls.

In the beginning of the 14th century, an abbot of St. Waast, Nicholas le Caudrelier, had founded and endowed in Paris the College of Arras. About the middle of the 18th century, it became a part of the College of Louis-le-Grand, one of the most important colleges of the great Paris University. The abbot of St. Waast had, however, the disposal of four scholarships, or "purses", entitling the holder to complete maintenance at the college until the termination of his studies. Through the good offices of one Aymé, canon of the cathedral,

Robespierre—who was first of his class and the recipient of numerous prizes—was awarded a scholarship. And so, at less than twelve years of age, he left familiar faces and scenes and travelled by stage-coach towards the city of his destiny.

A modern French author, writing about the schools he attended, has called his book *My Prisons*. Indeed, a prison atmosphere could hardly be more forbidding than is, even to-day, the medieval gloom and monastic regimen of some of the old French institutions of learning. The College of Louis-le-Grand, in the narrow Rue St. Jacques, at the time Robespierre entered it, would have dampened the spirits of a much more cheerful lad than he. Gloomy halls and vaulted corridors, a court shadowed by severe-looking buildings, economy in heating, so that in winter the boys' noses were sometimes blue and their fingers numb with cold, economy in nutrition, so that appetite was never wholly satisfied, strict discipline and a crabbed curriculum—such was the College of Louis-le-Grand.

His one relief was Sunday, which he was permitted to spend with a relative, the Abbé de Laroche, Canon of Notre-Dame. The abbé was good to him, and the boy, in his loneliness, developed a sincere attachment for him. But when he had been at the college two years, the mournful knell of Notre-Dame tolled for the abbé. Under the soaring Gothic arches, to the sound of the requiem, as he was trying to keep back the tears, did that protective shield of unemotionalism that characterized him in after life begin to form in him then? His mother, his father, now the abbé. . . . Love for mortal man or woman was vulnerable, too vulnerable! Not again would he build altars in his heart to that kind of love. He would love principles, ideas, which he thought were eternal.



ROBESPIERRE AS A BOY

From the portrait by Boze

In Paris, as formerly in Arras, he was a good student. Year after year he won prizes. Physically, however, he was below the average—small for his age, thin, narrow-chested. He was self-absorbed and mingled little with his comrades. There were several boys at the college with whom in adult life he was to be thrown again into contact: Duport-Dutertre, Lebrun, Fréron, Desmoulins. He struck up a friendship with the last, likewise a “purse” student and his junior by two years. Camille Desmoulins was gay, witty, irrepressible. He stuttered a little, his tongue having difficulty to keep pace with the kaleidoscopic working of his mind, but this only enhanced the impression he produced of facetious good-humour. It must have been contrast that drew him to the older boy with the grave, preoccupied manner. He developed for Robespierre a kind of hero-worship. Indeed, throughout his life he would be a shield-bearer, seconding natures stronger than his own. Mirabeau, Robespierre, Danton would, each in turn, be the objects of his enthusiastic madcap adulation.

There can be no doubt that being a “purse” student profoundly affected Robespierre’s character and future convictions. He knew that in the eyes of his aristocratic colleagues he was the recipient of charity, and his proud nature must have resented this and have eagerly sought refuge in a philosophy that regarded position and wealth as the fruit of usurpation, spoliation and injustice. Such a philosophy would enable him to feel that what he received was rightfully due him and that he owed no thanks to anybody. That this was his frame of mind is evidenced by several incidents during his future career and by the following curiously imperative letter he wrote, while still a student, to Proyard, the assistant principal of the college:

PARIS, *April 11*, 1778

SIR:

I have just learned that the Bishop of Arras is in Paris, and I would like very much to see him. I lack, however, a suitable coat as well as other things without which it is impossible for me to show myself in public. I hope that you will take the trouble of paying him a personal visit and acquainting him with my situation, so he may be induced to provide what is needful before I can appear in his presence.

I am, Sir, with respect, your very humble and obedient servant,

DE ROBESPIERRE, THE ELDER

VI

The name of Jean Jacques Rousseau was then on everybody's lips. It is difficult to convey an impression of the almost unbelievable vogue of that turbulent and erratic genius among his contemporaries. The Empress of Russia reads his *Emile* and orders corporal punishment to be stopped in all the schools of the empire. Two or three queens decide to nurse their infants themselves after reading the same volume. Half the aristocracy of France "returns to nature" by way of cultivating English gardens. One of his books is rented out at three francs an hour by the Paris bookshops, while another is ordered to be publicly burned by the executioner. He is loved and hated, idolized and ridiculed, invited by the King, ordered to be arrested, sought out by the great, and ostracized. He pursues women and is pursued by them; is received with public honours and popular acclaim, and his house is stoned by the populace; is offered lavish hospitality, and is driven ignominiously forth; four hundred pamphlets are written

in answer to one of his volumes, and he is the subject of a papal bull. Such are some of the vicissitudes of the man whom Napoleon charged with being responsible for the French Revolution.

The pupils of the College of Louis-le-Grand had of course been warned against him. Royau, the teacher of philosophy, had thundered against Rousseau and Voltaire—the latter a graduate of the institution. But this had only increased Robespierre's curiosity. It is not known when he first obtained access to Rousseau's writings. It is not impossible that he found them in the library of the Abbé de Laroche. Proyart, the assistant principal of the college, accuses him of having made the college privy a reading-room for immoral literature. Proyart's book is so full of obvious misstatements that serious historians have for the most part rejected it; this particular charge, however, sounds as if it might be true, except that the books were probably Rousseau's.

Rousseau's relation to the French Revolution is not unlike that of Marx to the Russian Revolution, and Marx's influence upon Lenin may be compared with Rousseau's upon Robespierre. Unlike Marx, Rousseau was not a political economist, but a metaphysical social philosopher and a literary artist. His astounding influence must be largely ascribed to his qualities as an artist and to his unquestionably sincere and deep-rooted sympathy with the common people, for the ideas he put forward were hardly original and his reasoning was frequently very faulty—or rather, he reasoned logically enough from false premises. But where an erudite, dispassionate criticism of society would have attracted little attention—or at best have exercised a very limited influence—Rousseau's passionate bugle-call quickened men's pulses and conjured up phantasmagoric visions of a promised land.

Issues die or present themselves under totally different aspects. The Rousseau of interest to us to-day is the Rousseau of the *Confessions*, for a soul sincerely confessing itself is never out-of-date. Few, indeed, to-day trouble to read his *Discourse on Inequality*, his *Social Contract* or his *Reflections on the Government of Poland*, which most influenced the men of the French Revolution and especially Robespierre. It is with the ideas contained in these that we will chiefly concern ourselves.

In the year 1750, the Academy of Dijon offered a prize for the best treatise on the subject: "Has the Establishment of Science and Literature benefited Society?" The question was queerly put and testifies to the metaphysical mode of reasoning prevailing at that time, since science and literature are not adventitious accessories but part of the social growth. This, however, seemed not to have occurred to two men who—as Marmontel tells us in his memoirs—were walking one day at Vincennes, shortly after the announcement made by the academy, and discussing the subject. Yet both were philosophers. Their names were Rousseau and Diderot. Rousseau informed his friend that he intended to compete.

"Which side will you take?" asked Diderot.

"The affirmative."

"That is the *pons asinorum*. All the mediocrities will take that route and will dispense commonplaces. Take the other side and you will find yourself in open country, rich and fruitful, where eloquence and philosophy can be given full play."

"You are right", said Rousseau after a moment's reflection. "I will follow your advice."

Rousseau wrote his treatise, received the prize, and made an instant and almost unparalleled sensation. An effete social class—tired not so much of civilization as

of itself, but preferring to blame civilization—hailed him as a new prophet. What more natural than his arriving at the conclusion that he had stumbled unwittingly upon an epoch-making truth? Thus a philosophical paradox and a literary *tour de force* gave birth to a social philosophy.

During all his future career as a writer and philosopher Rousseau remained faithful to the principle that nature makes man happy and good, loving justice and order, but that society corrupts him, causing him misery. Truly, an insecure basis upon which to found a political and economic system, but from this to conclude that, as a consequence, all of Rousseau's social and economic teachings are worthless, is to give him credit for a great deal less common sense than he in reality possessed. For the fact is that he did not build (or at least built to a very limited extent) upon this dubious base. He would lay his metaphysical foundation and then calmly abandon it and by its side put up an edifice that, as often as not, met practical requirements. Thus his theory of the inherent goodness of man and his metaphysical reasoning often are no more than a sort of pastoral and somewhat unreal atmosphere pervading a picture frequently realistic in its main outline. Let us take an example. Rousseau thus expresses himself regarding the private ownership of land:

"The first man who, having enclosed a piece of land, took it into his head to say: 'This is mine', and found people simple enough to believe him, was the real founder of civil society. What crimes, what battles, what murders and what horrible miseries would he have spared the human race, who should have torn down the fence and exclaimed: 'Beware how you listen to this impostor; you are lost if you forget that the fruit belongs to all and the earth to none'."

The fallaciousness of the reasoning is obvious. Rousseau assumes that the private ownership of land was an avoidable evil, instead of recognizing it as an unavoidable stage in social development—unavoidable because, as long as land was plentiful, the human impulse was not to tear down the fence another had built, but to put up one of one's own. But when it comes to suggesting a remedy, Rousseau fails to draw the logical conclusion from his metaphysical reasoning and becomes realistic. He does not propose the nationalization of land (wholly impractical in his day, and not even advocated by an extremist like Babeuf), but wishes to limit ownership to the amount necessary for the support of the owner's family, basing title on occupancy and cultivation, and eliminating absentee ownership.

One could thus follow him step by step and show that in practically every case his solution is other than his course of reasoning would lead us to expect, until one wonders whether his metaphysical approach was not a subtle mode of propaganda.

Politically Rousseau must be classed as a democrat, though on this and other matters he sometimes contradicts himself. Rousseau can frequently be disproved by Rousseau. It is not quite clear whether or not he believed in universal suffrage. He believed democracy to be compatible with monarchy, but hated oppression and considered resistance to it not only a right, but "the most sacred of duties".

Most significant (and herein lay his greatest influence upon Robespierre) was his economic doctrine. "The State, in relation to its citizens," he wrote, "is master of all their possessions. The Sovereign (the State) can seize legitimately all their property, as was done in Sparta at the time of Lycurgus. The right of each individual over

his property must always remain subordinated to the community's right over all." He believed democracy incompatible with too great inequality of fortune: "As soon as in a democracy the few outstrip the many in the matter of wealth, the State must either perish or cease being a democracy". Hence it behoved the State to keep a just balance in the wealth and income of its citizens: "All private fortunes must be brought down to that level of mediocrity which constitutes the real force of the State". This, however, did not imply absolute economic equality: "By equality we must not understand that the degrees of power and wealth are to be absolutely the same, but that no citizen should be rich enough to purchase another, nor poor enough to be forced to sell himself. If you wish to make the State durable, you must neither allow opulence nor want."

It is this doctrine—which to those acquainted with Plato's *Republic* will not appear strikingly novel—that haunted Robespierre throughout his political career.

In the matter of religion, Rousseau favoured setting up a code of ethics, to be known as the "Civic Religion". All religions conforming to the code would be allowed, those failing to conform to it, prohibited. A citizen would have the right to profess none but the Civic Religion. Those refusing to accept the code could be banished, and he who, while pretending to accept it, conducted himself as if he did not believe in it, could be punished with death. "He has committed the greatest of crimes: he has lied in the face of the law."

Rousseau realized that some of the measures he advocated would not work in practice. He says, in *Émile*: "I should not be astonished if in the midst of all this reasoning my young man interrupted me and said: 'One would imagine that we are building our edifice of

wood, and not of living men, so accurately fits one piece into another' ”.

Robespierre had to build his edifice of living men, hence realized that he could not accept Rousseau unreservedly. When, in 1794, Jullien proposed that those not believing in a Supreme Being (the Civic Religion) be expelled from the Jacobin Club, Robespierre opposed him, saying that this was a part of Rousseau's teachings that should not be translated into practice. He strongly favoured an inheritance tax, which Rousseau rejected, and universal suffrage, on which Rousseau's stand is rather doubtful. Yet many of his proposals can be traced to Rousseau, and it is even possible to paraphrase important parts of some of his speeches from Rousseau's writings. Historians have finally recognized, however, that Robespierre had a keen sense of the practical. There is no evidence that he ever tried to fit society into a preconceived system. His method was empirical.

VII

The principal effect of Rousseau upon him while he was still in college, was that he ceased being a good Catholic. Religious exercises became distasteful to him. In chapel he would hold his prayer-book in his hand, but would not turn the pages. His lips did not move. During the singing he would remain silent. Towards the end of his college course (Proyart tells us), he ceased going to Communion.

He met Rousseau once. We know little about the meeting, except that it must have taken place sometime in 1778. He must have visited Rousseau either in Paris—where the old philosopher lived in the Rue Platrière (now Rue Jean Jacques Rousseau)—or at Ermenonville, thirty miles from Paris, where he spent the last

six weeks of his life. Rousseau, who lived with an old virago, Thérèse Le Vasseur—an ignorant and vicious chambermaid, who had been his mistress and whom he finally married—was a difficult man to approach. He was suffering from a persecution mania, and not infrequently would insult a visitor. He must, however, have received his young disciple rather well, for Robespierre, who was proud and sensitive, never spoke or wrote except with unqualified admiration and respect about this spiritual father of his. The meeting has no special significance, except that there had sat opposite each other two men: an old man who had forged the arms, and a young man who would use them with greater skill and firmer conviction than any of his contemporaries. Napoleon has been called “Robespierre on Horseback”; Robespierre, with greater justice, may be called “Rousseau in Power”.

VIII

His last three years of study Robespierre spent outside the college walls, living in a tiny apartment in the Rue St. Jacques. He worked as junior clerk in the office of the Procurator of Parliament, Nolleau, and at the same time attended the College of Law. It was during this period that Robespierre met Rousseau and wrote the letter to Proyart. One can easily imagine him walking in the Luxembourg garden meditating upon his future. Perhaps then already he dreamt himself a Rousseau in Power, more than likely he only wished to write like Rousseau, for he had great literary ambition. His own poverty and that of the people in that crowded quarter of Paris undoubtedly predisposed him to his future career, but it was his intellect, rather than his heart, that prompted him to rebellion. Cold, reserved,

solitary by nature, he loved humanity only in the abstract. What he really loved was ideas and the finely turned phrase.

Ernest Hamel, who some seventy years ago compiled all the then available facts about him in three bulky volumes, confesses to having suppressed some information he possessed about Robespierre's love affairs during this period, and which can now no longer be found. "As a young man", says Hamel, "he had attachments over which an easily understandable discretion commands us to draw a veil." Hamel lived in the Victorian age; we of the Freudian era are hardly grateful to him for this excessive delicacy. But whatever the nature of those affairs, they could not have been very serious. He was a born ascetic. His attitude towards women was one of ironic and slightly contemptuous gallantry. No revolutionary leader has been more idolized by women, and none showed himself more indifferent to them. When it was rumoured that he would speak, the galleries were packed with women. They quarrelled about him, and wrote him open or disguised love-letters. Yet, among all the letters from his pen that have come to light, there is not one that by the furthest stretch of the imagination can be called a love-letter. He never married, though he was supposed to have been engaged three times. We know that for a short time he kept a paid mistress.

CHAPTER TWO

THE LAWYER

I

ROBESPIERRE was twenty-two when, his diploma in his pocket, he returned to Arras with the intention to practise law. The college authorities had, on graduation, presented him with a purse containing 600 francs, as a mark of satisfaction with his conduct and scholarly attainments, which somewhat belies the Abbé Proyart's adverse criticism. Three years before, he had gone to see the Abbot of St. Waast (none other now than the Cardinal de Rohan, he of the famous affair of the necklace), and had asked that his younger brother Augustin be allowed to succeed to his scholarship. The request had been granted, and Augustin was now at the college. Another member of the family missing from Arras was his sister Henriette, who had died at nineteen from anaemia. Let us see what manner of man this was who now came to Arras, destined to become the most controversial figure in French history—a figure whom some of his admirers have placed in historical importance between Richelieu and Napoleon, for whom they have claimed every personal and political virtue and far-sighted statesmanship, and whom his enemies have classed as a monster, a “drinker of blood”, a tiger, a Catiline, and have denied importance or even ability.

Buffenoir has made an interesting compilation of the portraits of Robespierre, a study of which will disclose

that most of them are dissimilar to an astonishing degree. Descriptions of him are equally conflicting. He was lean, he was fat, he smiled perpetually, he never smiled, are some of the contradictions. The supposed death mask of Robespierre in the Tussaud Museum in London furnishes no clue, Fleischmann having shown beyond a doubt that it is spurious, as are two other death masks, one of which was at one time on display at the Muscum Carnavalet in Paris, but has since been withdrawn. Nevertheless, a sufficient number of the portraits and descriptions correspond with one another to enable us to form a fairly accurate and comprehensive idea of his physical appearance.

He was spare, short of stature, not over five feet three, and carried himself erect, head high. His step was quick, but not over decisive, his movements brusque. He dressed immaculately, and his chestnut-brown hair—brushed back, and fluffed out at the temples—was carefully powdered. His face—smooth-shaven, in accordance with the prevailing mode—was gaunt, with small, pointed chin and very high cheek-bones. It was as broad as it was long, giving it, when viewed from in front and at distance, a chubby appearance. His complexion was clear, but pale, of a faintly greenish hue, “like that of an invalid or a man worn out by vigils and meditation”. He was slightly pock-marked, but it is emphasized by one hostile to him that it was not to a disfiguring extent.

His features had a certain sharp and strained intensity, but were not unpleasing. His forehead, which he had the habit of wrinkling, was high, broad, bulging at the temples and slightly receding. His grey-green eyes had a steely, but not unkindly gleam. His nose—broad-bridged and with wide nostrils—was almost straight, with a slight indentation towards the end. His

mouth was large, thin-lipped, and a faint, almost perpetual smile of mingled irony and benevolence hovered about its corners. When the smile was absent his face would take on a peculiarly severe expression. He habitually wore glasses, which towards the end of his career were tinted green, and which he had a way of shoving up on his forehead.

His voice was high-pitched, but well modulated. He made few gestures. A few mannerisms are reported, some of which he undoubtedly acquired during the last hectic years of his life: a nervous doubling up of his fists; a jerking of his shoulders; a blinking of his eyes; and a quick turning of his head from one side to the other, as if to surprise some hostile presence or movement. The fact that several attempts were made upon his life may have been responsible for the development of the latter habit.

His clothing, as has been said, was immaculate, almost to the point of elegance, and that notwithstanding a very scanty wardrobe. It was, however, a little behind the times. "He looks like a tailor of the old régime", one of his enemies said of him. He usually wore an olive-green or brown coat with large metal buttons, a light-coloured waistcoat, dark or fawn-coloured knee-breeches, white stockings, and shoes with silver buckles. Around his neck he wore a white stock, and lace fringes peeped from out of the sleeves of his coat. As a rule he kept to sober colours, but occasionally would blossom out in gayer attire. A pencil-sketch made of him during the Convention bears the following notation about his clothing: "Green-striped nankeen coat; blue-striped white vest; red-striped white tie".

His appearance gave away his character: a man with great self-respect, loving system and order, some-

what rigid and opinionated, but with a high moral sense.

II

His maternal grandparents having died, he had received his share of the inheritance. Grandmother Carrault had specified in her will that the other heirs were to make no claim against Maximilien and Augustin for money expended on them during her lifetime. The aunt from whom his father had borrowed money, and who had since married an old doctor by the name of Durut, was less generous and filed a claim against the estate, which resulted in a coolness between her and her nephew. With the money he inherited, Robespierre furnished a small house in the Rue de Saumon, where he went to live with his sister Charlotte. He soon discovered, however, that his income would not stand the strain of even this modest establishment, and having reconciled himself with the Duruts, went to live with them.

Eventually his practice improved, and he rented a house in the Rue des Rapporteurs, a narrow street debouching upon the sleepy provincial square known as the Place du Théâtre. The street owed its name to an old inn once located there, the signboard of which, above a picture of rats scurrying off with morsels of food, displayed the legend: *Auberge des Rats Porteurs*—which in the course of time became metamorphosed to Rapporteurs. The house, somewhat altered, still stands, in spite of the German bombardment. It is an unattractive-looking, two-storied corner house of red brick, with buff-coloured window shutters and three stone steps leading to an undistinguished front door, which in his day was in the centre, but is now on the right. The sunlight seldom penetrates into the interior. It is prosaic, cold, gloomy, utilitarian, and has neither

yard nor garden. It now contains a bar and several offices. A commemorative tablet, affixed in 1923, with some ceremony, by the *Société des Études Robespierriennes*, informs the occasional observant stranger that Robespierre lived there from 1787 to 1789.

Until 1933, there was nothing else in Arras to commemorate his memory. In the fairly large local museum; not a portrait, manuscript or letter. One received the impression that his native town was still somewhat ashamed of him. But the changed attitude of historians and the efforts of the above-named society have finally borne fruit. A monument to his memory has been erected in his home city, and the street in which the house is located is now known as the Rue Maximilien Robespierre.

III

Charlotte kept house for him. She was a decisive-featured young woman of a somewhat difficult disposition. As long as there was no other woman around to interfere with her—especially to interfere with her management of her two beloved brothers—little fault could be found with her; but if another of her sex happened to be near, there was apt to be a quarrel. Augustin was her favourite. He was more pleasing in appearance and had a way about him, especially with women. She thought he would have made a great general, in which she was wrong. She spent most of her share of the inheritance helping him while he was in college, for which he did not show himself inordinately grateful.

It was a rather monotonous existence she and Maximilien were leading. Robespierre would rise at six or seven in the morning, would sit down at his writing-table and work until eight. Then the barber would

come to shave him and to dress his hair. In the Museum Carnavalet can be seen his earthenware shaving-bowl, of the shape made famous by Don Quixote's helmet. It had to be held under the chin by the client himself while the shaving was in progress. The powdering of the hair was likewise an interesting, if somewhat dusty performance. Such vast quantities of powder were required that the patient's head was enveloped as in a cloud, and he had to hide his features in a paper cornucopia to keep from smothering and looking as if he had suffered a headlong plunge into a flour barrel. Robespierre was exceedingly particular about this part of his toilet. Not until that last terrible day of his life was he ever seen in public unshaven or not carefully powdered. When he travelled he carried a bag of powder and a large powder-puff with him.

The barbering finished, he would go downstairs in his dressing-gown and breakfast on a glass of milk. Then he would return to his writing and work until ten, when he would dress and go to court. He lunched frugally, not particularly caring what he ate, though he was partial to fruit, especially oranges. His former school-fellow, Fréron (an unmitigated scoundrel, who had good reasons for hating him), tells us in a rather spiteful description that the acerbity of Robespierre's expression seemed to yield to the acidity of orange juice, and that his face would visibly relax as he ate the fruit. One could always tell where he had sat at table by the number of orange peelings, he assures us. Robespierre never drank to excess, a common failing in his day. His favourite beverages were coffee, and wine diluted with water. After lunch, if the weather permitted, he would go for a walk in the country or visit friends. Evenings he spent at home with Charlotte, unless they made a social call.

His fondness for birds lasted into his manhood. He kept pigeons in the attic, and there usually was a canary or two about the house. There has been preserved a rather charming, playful letter he wrote to a young woman about a couple of those canaries. Later, when weighed down with cares of State, he would find distraction feeding sparrows in the Tuileries.

He continued very self-absorbed, not infrequently passing acquaintances on the street without noticing them, which made him a few enemies and gave him the reputation of being haughty. At times this absorption verged on the abnormal. Thus he once sat down at table and proceeded to help himself to soup without noticing that there was no plate in front of him, pouring the soup out on the tablecloth. Another time, when out walking with Charlotte, something having entered his mind that he thought worthy of committing to paper, he promptly forgot her presence and hastened home. When later she entered his room, he innocently asked where she had been. When they went visiting and others would play cards, he would often retire into an armchair and sit there meditating, seemingly oblivious to what went on about him.

He was morbidly sensitive, especially when his self-esteem was involved. In a letter giving an account of a jaunt to Carvin, he himself relates how his day was almost spoilt by the failure of some farm labourers to return his greeting.

IV

• He was, however, not devoid of social graces or amiability. He carried on a polite correspondence with several young women of Arras and the vicinity. The letters are written in a bantering, graceful manner. It is evident that he took pains in writing them, wishing to

produce epistles worthy of the man of letters he aspired to be. He is likewise said to have been a fair dancer. Nevertheless, the most characteristic thing about him is his loneliness. Many would be devoted to him, even to the extent of being ready to die for him (some, indeed, did die for him), but his innermost self remained locked up and hidden from all mortal eyes. None, as far as we know, ever received a glimpse of it. His private notebook, found after his death, gives interesting glimpses of the statesman, none of the man.

There was in Arras a gay literary club, known as the Rosati. The members were professional men, local office-holders, officers of the garrison, a few abbés. They were for the most part young and of literary taste. Lazare Carnot, famous as the organizer of the revolutionary armies—then a captain of engineers in garrison at Arras—was a devotee of the club. Still another member was that Uriah Heep of history, Joseph Fouché—at that time not yet a duke, but a teacher at a boys' seminary in Arras. Those belonging to the club would gather periodically in a pleasant spot on the bank of the Scarpe, crown themselves with roses, sing, drink, make love and recite poetry, usually of their own composition. When a new member was initiated he had to pluck a rose, inhale the odour three times, put it in his button-hole, empty a glass of rose-coloured wine in one draught in honour of all members, past, present and future, of the Rosati, and embrace the member he was most fond of. He would then be welcomed by the president with a pompous speech, which would later be presented to him in an envelope the seal of which bore the image of a rose. He had to respond by singing an appropriate poem of his own composition to a popular tune of that day.

Robespierre joined the club, and for a while appears

to have whole-heartedly taken part in this amiable nonsense. The minutes of one of the meetings record that there was not a discordant note at the meeting, except such as were sung by Monsieur de Robespierre. He was writing poetry at that time, and was wont to recite it to his fellow members. Some dozen of the poems have been preserved. They prove conclusively that he was not a poet. Best known is the *Madrigal*, written for Ophelia Mondlen, a former flame of his in Paris, who is said to have been English. Others are a drinking song, a few rather insipid love lyrics (in which, characteristically, he speaks of homage, respect, admiration, but not of love), a poem celebrating the Rosati, and one vaunting the virtues and contentment of a man living in the country in conformity with the principles of Rousseau. He was rather vain of his literary endeavours, and most of them—including a few of his legal briefs—he tried to give some permanence by having them printed; but he seems to have had no illusions about his poetry. He never published any of it. The *Madrigal* was later printed without his consent by a royalist paper wishing to make game of him.

There is in existence the faded manuscript of a portion of a speech he delivered before the Rosati, in which he endeavoured to convince them that the club should assume more serious ways and occupy itself with political matters. One can well imagine that his stern nature in time rebelled against the frivolity. Like all men possessed of an idea, he did not know the art of living, which consists mainly in the enjoyment of things that are purposeless. He was a man with a purpose, and everything not in some way connected with that purpose gave him ultimately a feeling of impatience.

Men whose talents are political or military are peculiarly dependent on circumstances. Lenin, not unlikely, will be remembered as one of the most significant personalities of the 20th century, but if the World War had not taken place he would have lived and died a theorist of the cafés. There may be walking, to-day, the streets of Paris, London or New York, a potential Lenin or Robespierre, but unless circumstances arise favourable to the exercise of his peculiar talents, history will not record his name. But for the Revolution, Napoleon (as he himself realized) could not even have reached the rank of general—generals, under the old régime, being chosen exclusively from the high nobility. Or had Robespierre succeeded—as he wellnigh did succeed—Napoleon would have been just another revolutionary general, somewhat more important than Hoche. Had he tried to be more, he would have been beheaded. And but for the Revolution, Robespierre would have been a moderately successful country lawyer and a literary bore.

Goethe said of Napoleon that he turned to action being unable to succeed in literature. This is far more true of Robespierre. He was ambitious to become a literary man, a stylist. He wrote a great deal in Arras—poems, memoirs, treatises, legal briefs, discourses. Many of his manuscripts have been preserved. All show the same straining after style. He corrected and recorrected, seldom changing the thought, but burnishing and reburnishing his sentences. Whole pages and paragraphs are crossed out, rewritten on the wide margin and sometimes crossed out a second time, all in a fine, crowded, feminine hand. Curiously, except in his signature, he uses no capitals. "My manuscripts, illegible,

full of erasures, corrections, confusion, attest the pains they have cost me." The quotation is not from him, but from Rousseau, who seems to have experienced the same difficulty as his disciple in giving precise expression to his thoughts, and whose *La Nouvelle Héloïse* Robespierre is said to have kept constantly near him while at work, so that he might animate his style by occasionally dipping into what was to him a limpid fount of literary perfection.

While, ultimately, he developed a style that does not lack individuality, this can hardly be said of his writing in Arras. His style, at that time, was the wearisome, baroque style of the period. The muses, the graces, half the nomenclature of antiquity, lie enmeshed in his curious sentences. His memoirs have been lost. He used to send them, by instalments, to one or more of his women friends, whom he would likewise favour occasionally with one of his briefs, when he imagined it to have particular appeal to the feminine heart.

In 1783, the Academy of Metz offered a prize for a treatise on whether the relatives of a criminal should share his legal disgrace. Robespierre competed, taking of course the negative view. The style of his treatise is stilted, and the argument rather lifeless, but it evidently met the academic requirements of that period, for he won the second prize, which, curiously, was the same as the first—400 francs. It likewise brought him more than local renown. He spent the prize money in having the manuscript printed, and sending copies to his friends.

• The following year he tried again, this time for a prize offered by the Academy of Amiens. The subject was a eulogy of a minor poet, de Gresset. He failed to get the prize, which was not awarded to any of the contestants. He eulogized de Gresset extravagantly,

both as a poet and as a man, in language meant to be elegant, but which to present-day taste appears tedious and artificial. The chief interest of the treatise lies in the fact that it gives a first glimpse into his religious convictions: he rejects the scepticism of Voltaire for the broad, but ardent faith of Rousseau. Not discouraged by his failure to win the prize, he had the eulogy printed at his own expense, and again his friends were given the opportunity to be bored. One retaliated by sending him a long poem, in which he eulogized the eulogizer.

The previous year he had been elected member of the Academy of Arras. The membership of the Academy was practically identical with that of the Rosati, but the Academy was as solemn as the Rosati was frivolous. While at the Rosati they entertained one another with bad poetry, at the Academy they wearied one another with stodgy discourses. Robespierre became one of the leading and most articulate members, and was finally elected president. Here, even more than in the court-room, he got his training as a public speaker. He usually read his speeches, and developed a pedagogic style of address that sounded a little pedantic. It later met with ridicule in the National Assembly and he was forced to modify it, greatly to the advantage of the quality of his oratory.

Soon after his return to Arras he had been appointed by the bishop Judge of the Ecclesiastical Court. It was not a very important office, yet might put him to the necessity of having to pronounce a death sentence. When, finally, such a contingency arose, in the case of a murderer, he was greatly upset, and for two days and nights hardly ate or slept, pacing the floor at home and repeating: "The man is a scoundrel. He deserves to die. But to kill a man! To kill a man!"

The incident is told us by Charlotte, and her state-

ment regarding his reluctance to sign the death warrant is confirmed in a letter from his fellow judge, Guffroy. But there is no evidence whatever that he resigned the office, as Charlotte would have us believe.

VI

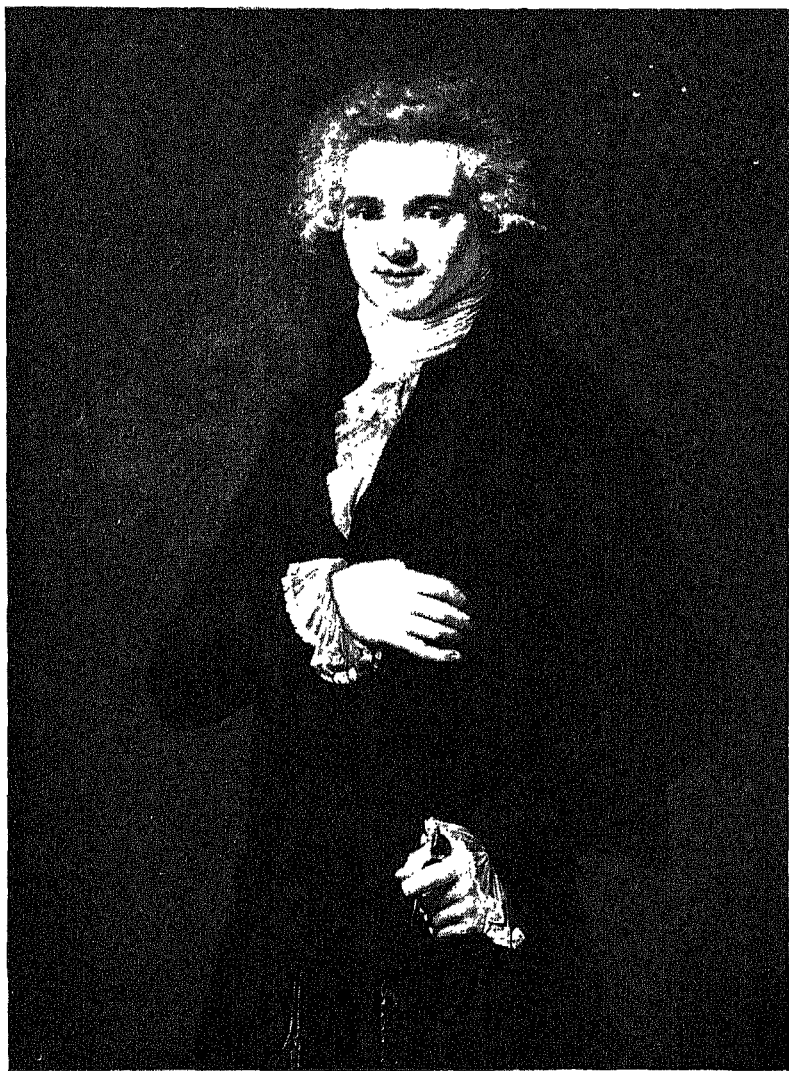
All this while he was busy with his law practice. He lost few cases, but his practice did not greatly increase and was not remunerative. He was not the man to make money: he cared too little for it. "A little suffices for him who has no desires", he wrote once. Danton said of him that he was afraid of money; and Mirabeau, who himself had taken bribes, when told an attempt had been made to bribe Robespierre, remarked: "They may as well save themselves the trouble: the man has no wants". When he died, a couple of uncashed salary vouchers and fifty francs in assignats were found in the bureau drawer of the one little room he had occupied, and the sum total of his personal belongings brought 450 francs at auction.¹

He frequently took cases of people who could pay him little or nothing. Charlotte claims that on more than one occasion he even paid the court costs himself. He was the poor man's lawyer, and seemed to glory in it. Many of the cases he took would have been passed up by a prudent man anxious to curry favour with those whose goodwill and patronage make the road of life smooth. His pleas were often turgid, sometimes even bombastic, though allowance must be made for the style of the period; but he did not know how to

¹ The sale of the furniture in his room brought 2800 francs, but there is some question whether it belonged to him. The comparatively high figure would indicate that it was bought by collectors, for it was of extreme simplicity.

fawn. His argument was usually such as to make him decidedly unpopular with the court, the prosecutor and the substantial element of the community, including most of his colleagues. Once he was publicly rebuked and part of his plea ordered stricken out, because it was considered disrespectful to the court, the law and constituted authority.

While he was undoubtedly sincere when priding himself on being the defender of the poor and oppressed, it must yet be acknowledged that some of the "poor and oppressed" he championed were not deserving of much sympathy. There was, for example, the usurer, sentenced to the stocks by a lower court, on whose behalf he pleaded that guilt had not been sufficiently well established. He lost himself in dizzy flights of oratory trying to prove it were better for twenty guilty to escape than for a single innocent to suffer. There was the Englishwoman, none too scrupulous about meeting her bills, who had spent nineteen days in a debtors' prison, and on whose behalf he sued for damages. The judges ordered the pleas to be submitted in writing, and he accommodated them to the extent of sixty-four pages in quarto of weird melodrama, in which the injured lady appeals for justice to the chivalry of the French nation. The redeeming feature of the plea is that it contains a vigorous protest against imprisonment for debt. Seldom, in fact, did he make a plea without using the occasion to expound his political and sociological doctrine. At times he seemed to forget his client entirely in his eagerness to show what was wrong with the world, and he usually finished with a rhetorical appeal to the monarch to take the initiative in remedying this or that crying evil. One can well imagine that the judges considered him a nuisance, and that the business men of Arras looked askance at this young



ROBESPIERRE AS A YOUNG MAN

From the portrait by Ducreux

firebrand of a lawyer, and preferred to take their legal work elsewhere, while he had to be satisfied with cases that, if often sensational, were seldom remunerative.

VII

Towards the end of his second year of law practice he obtained a case that attracted nation-wide attention. His plea on that occasion amply proves that but for his radical convictions, he could have had a brilliant career as a lawyer. Since it remained his most important case and throws an interesting sidelight on his contemporaries, it deserves a little fuller mention.

There lived on a country estate at St. Omer, in the neighbourhood of Arras, a wealthy retired lawyer by the name of de Visser. He was a man of many hobbies, being an amateur physicist, painter, botanist, inventor and what not. Benjamin Franklin—then in France on his famous mission—had some time before invented the lightning rod, and de Visser, friend of all progress, had one put on the tallest chimney of his imposing country residence. Now, de Visser had had a dispute with one of his neighbours, a widow, about a dividing wall, and it occurred to the woman that the lightning rod furnished an excellent opportunity to settle old scores. She made the rounds of the neighbours and proceeded to enlighten them on the disastrous possibilities of lightning rods, which, she averred, drew down the lightning from the skies. She contended that de Visser, by his rash experimentation, was endangering not only his own property, but that of his neighbours as well.

She could hardly have been very convincing, for not more than four or five of the neighbours allowed themselves to be persuaded to sign a petition, addressed to

the village authorities, that the lightning rod be ordered removed. This, however, proved ample. In fact, the Village Board, more gullible than the citizens, considered the danger so imminent that it ordered de Vissery to take down the pernicious contraption within twenty-four hours, failing which it would be removed by the bailiff at his expense. De Vissery demanded a hearing, which was held in the village hall, the whole village attending. The Board confirmed its order. By this time the villagers had taken fright. A mob gathered in front of de Vissery's house, threatening to burn it down. When he was further informed that a company of grenadiers was on its way to effect forcible removal, he yielded, at least in appearance; for the canny de Vissery merely removed the long point of the lightning rod and substituted a short one. It effectively fooled the villagers and the authorities.

But, like most reformers, he had more zeal than sense of humour. He was not satisfied to chuckle, he must triumph. So he engaged Robespierre to represent him and appealed the case to the Provincial Court of the Province of Artois.

To act as the St. George of science against the dragon of superstition and ignorance, what a chance for a young radical! Robespierre's faithful friend Buissart, who assisted him, immediately got into communication with all the principal scientific bodies in the kingdom. Within a short time the case was being discussed from one end of France to the other. The Academy of Dijon solemnly went on record that de Vissery's lightning rod was not dangerous and constructed in accordance with the principles of science. The Academy of Montpellier gave its opinion of the village authorities in no uncertain terms. Condorcet, Secretary of the National Academy of Science, was appealed to. The Academy of

Arras took its stand for progress and lightning rods.

On May 31, 1783, the case was called for trial. Robespierre had armed himself with all the latest scientific information and an imposing array of authorities. He read the judges a lecture on electricity. He cited his authorities. He proved that lightning rods were being used in France and elsewhere on powder magazines and protected the sacred lives of many of the crowned heads of Europe. He eulogized science and blighted ignorance and superstition. "The arts and sciences are heaven's noblest gift to mankind" was his opening sentence. He finished by calling upon the judges to wipe this stain from the escutcheon of France.

He got the decision, but the case was appealed and remained in the courts four years. De Vissery lived only three months to enjoy the final triumphal vindication of lightning rods. In the meantime, however, he had contributed four golden louis towards having 500 copies of Robespierre's argument printed and sent to the principal academies. Robespierre sent a copy with an appropriate letter to Benjamin Franklin. A citizen of Arras—Ansart—thus commented on Robespierre's plea in a letter to a friend: "Nothing new in our town, except that a certain Robespierre made his *début* here in a famous case and pleaded during three sittings in a manner that might well give young legal aspirants food for thought". *The Mercury of France* paid the young lawyer this unintentionally ambiguous compliment: "The argument does great honour to Monsieur de Robespierre, barely emerged from adolescence".

VIII

He tried a case for Carnot, involving an inheritance for an old serving woman of the latter. It is reported

that Carnot's brother (likewise a captain), dissatisfied with Robespierre's handling of the case, interrupted the proceedings. Not unlikely he found him too prolix. But Robespierre won the case, as for that matter he did most of his cases, which suggests that his fustian pleas might have had their justification.

One day he received a visit from a number of peasants with a grievance against their landlord—none other than the Bishop of Arras. It is not quite clear to what extent that bishop contributed to Robespierre's maintenance in college, but that he made some contribution is evident from Maximilien's letter to Proyart. Nevertheless, finding the peasants' case just, Robespierre accepted it and fought it to a successful conclusion. It is claimed that the bishop—a good loser—congratulated him on his plea. There can be no doubt that Robespierre acted from principle, since it could hardly have been to his interest to risk the enmity of so powerful a man; yet one cannot help asking oneself whether he should not have regarded the cause of gratitude as worthy of equal consideration with that of justice. There is, however, good reason to believe that his views of social justice made him disclaim any debt of gratitude towards the bishop.

Another case that attracted wide attention was that of Francis Déteuf. Déteuf's sister, Clementine, had been employed as laundress in the Abbey of St. Sauveur d'Anchin, and the treasurer of the abbey—Dom Brogniard—had tried to seduce her. The girl repulsed him, and the monk, who had committed the further indiscretion of squandering some of the funds entrusted to him, thought of the expedient of making one lie serve the double purpose of revenge and self-exculpation by accusing the girl's brother of having stolen 262 golden louis from him. Déteuf was poor and friendless, the

abbey rich and powerful, and the prior espoused the cause of the unworthy monk. All this, however, did not deter Robespierre from taking the case. It was, in fact, the sort of case he would have taken had it spelled his ruin. He not only cleared Déteuf, but sued for damages and obtained a settlement.

IX

Louis XVI, short of money, perplexed, yielding and stubborn by turns, as weak men often are, had finally accepted the advice of his Finance Minister, Necker, to call the States General, which was to help him solve his tangled financial problems. He was not without misgivings, but had not the States General been called in 1614, and had it not been dismissed without much difficulty when no longer needed? Then why worry?

The nobility, the clergy and the Third Estate were each to elect separate representatives—the last as many as the first two combined, which was not as generous as it appeared on the surface, since the commoners were expected to foot by far the greater part of the bill, and their deputies were to represent about 25,000,000 people against some 200,000 nobility and clergy. Nevertheless, the nobles slept uneasily in their beds, while Louis enjoyed a short popularity, being called the “Just,” the “Liberator” and such other euphemisms.

And now, for the first time in two hundred years, it was possible to speak one's mind without imminent danger of being thrown into jail. They spoke it with a vengeance, and those who had money to pay a printer, or could find a publisher to do it for them, rushed into print. Never since the invention of the printing-press had there been such a flood of ink and paper. It was as

if the living felt constrained not only to voice their own grievances, but likewise those of generations that had died unprotesting. They attacked everything, from the *lettres de cachet* and the feudal rights of the nobility, to God in His heaven and the custom of shaving the beard. But in this mad chorus there was no mistaking the leitmotiv. It was Rousseau's. He did not "make the Revolution", as said Napoleon, and did not "drive many people to madness who without him merely would have been fools", as wrote Barnave, but he furnished the revolutionists with a philosophy which probably served the purpose as well as any other philosophy could have done at that time. The supporters of the old régime for a moment seemed dazed, then, with a bellow of rage, they unloosed a flood of their own, to meet and combat the first flood. It was a whirlpool, a hurricane, a Bedlam, and out of this was to be born the States General.

X

At the first announcement that the States General was to be called, Robespierre sat down at his writing-table in the house in the Rue des Rapporteurs and wrote a pamphlet. It was some eighty pages long and dealt with conditions in the Province of Artois—neither better nor worse than those in most other provinces—and with the Provincial Assembly.

The manner of election of the Assembly—the legislative body of the province—was, indeed, as ingenious a piece of political legerdemain as can be imagined. The members—nearly all of the nobility and higher clergy, with such commoners and humble priests as they wished to tolerate—were elected by the municipal officers, who themselves were appointed by a commission elected by the Assembly, so that, in the last

analysis, the Assembly elected itself! The spirit of the times took possession of Robespierre as he wrote: he forgot about style and about most of his literary and classical baggage. In trenchant language he exposed and stigmatized the manner of election of the Assembly and called for re-establishment of ancient rights. Most of all, however, he protested against the treatment of the peasantry.

We have it on the authority of Taine that out of every hundred francs earned by the French peasant before the Revolution, he was permitted to keep only nineteen. Fourteen went to the lord, fourteen to the Church, and fifty-three to the King and the King's government in taxes of all kinds. Robespierre pointed out that special war taxes were being levied twenty-six years after the declaration of peace; that the smallest peasant holding paid from three to four times as much in taxes as the largest feudal estate; and that notwithstanding the bankrupt condition of the treasury, large gifts of money were being made to favourite officials and their relatives. He painted in lurid colours the misery and degradation of the peasants and their inability to protest. For if they protested or failed to meet the crushing charges, what happened? In the dead of night, by the flare of torches, their wretched hovels would be invaded by armed men, and they, their wives and children dragged off to prison. There were times when the jails of the province were gorged with such victims, some of them women in a state of pregnancy.

He had thrown down the gage. No one could read the pamphlet without realizing that here was a man to be reckoned with. The first edition sold out quickly, and a second amplified edition was put up for sale. He had not openly announced himself as a candidate for the States General, but it was plain that he intended to

run. The supporters of the old régime took it so, and began an insidious campaign of slander. It was even thought that he had overstepped the bounds sufficiently to justify legal action against him. His friends rallied to his support and now openly presented him as a candidate, while he came out with a second pamphlet, in which, without mentioning any names (a favourite method of his whether praising or blaming), he tried to guide the suffrages of the electors towards men he himself favoured.

The election in Artois was indirect, three times removed. There were some stormy sessions of the electors, during which he spoke repeatedly and in a manner somewhat irritating to the governor of the province. Each province, besides choosing its representatives, had to state its grievances and suggest reforms—the famous *cahiers*. The nobility and clergy of Artois declared themselves willing, as their contribution towards the new era, to abandon certain of their privileges. News of this having reached the Third Estate, some of the delegates were seized with gratitude to the extent of wishing to send a committee to thank the nobility and clergy for their generosity and patriotism. Robespierre arose and caustically remarked that he saw no reason why people should be thanked for offering to abandon abuses of which they had been guilty. This is quite characteristic of him and helps us to understand his apparent ingratitude towards the bishop. Enough of the delegates were, however, in sympathy with his attitude to permit him to be elected fifth in the list of eight.

He gave a further demonstration of unconventionality at a banquet the leading citizens of Arras tendered to the deputies elect. Among those drafted to serve at table was a poor cobbler and handy-man by the name of

Languillette, to whom one of the nobles—Ferdinand de Fosseux—facetiously remarked that the new era having dawned, he could now look forward to becoming Mayor of Arras. Robespierre overheard the remark and took up the challenge. Addressing himself to Languillette, but loud enough for all present to hear, he said:

“Remember, my friend, what I am going to tell you. Everything in France *is* going to change. Before long, poor Languillette, whom the de Fosseux despise, will be able to take a well-earned rest. The Languillettes will, indeed, become mayors, and the mayors, Languillettes.”

It is not recorded what impression this acrid remark produced upon the diners. No doubt they found it in exceedingly bad taste. Men with a mission have been known to be guilty of such bad taste before. There are several examples of it in the Bible.

Fate, which on occasion seems to have a fondness for the weirdly symbolical, was preparing a suitable dénouement: during the Terror, Lebon, the proconsul, was to order the Mayor of Arras to be beheaded and assign his residence to Languillette, the cobbler—and the mayor was to be . . . de Fosseux!

The incident stamps Robespierre as having been, from the beginning, not so much a representative of the Third Estate, as of the Fourth Estate—the proletariat; and it was fitting that the cobblers of Arras should have come to him to prepare their bill of grievances (*cabier*).

Finally, one day in early May, 1789, when Robespierre was almost exactly thirty-one years old, he and his fellow representatives, sixteen in all, started for Versailles amidst the cheering of the multitude and the tolling of church bells. Charlotte, Augustin and his

relatives and friends were there to see him off. Among the latter was Anaïs Deshorties, a young girl reported to have been engaged to him. She was the stepdaughter of one of his aunts, who, late in life, had married a widower. She now promised to wait for him, but as time progressed and he seemed to be in no hurry, she found waiting a tedious business and married his friend Leducq.

CHAPTER THREE

VERSAILLES

I

WHAT were the causes of the Revolution that was now about to light up all Europe and the American continent with its apocalyptical glow? "All that happens", says Montesquieu, "is the result of an infinite number of previous happenings, stretching in an ever more intricate chain from century to century." The Revolution had been preparing for a hundred years or more, say historians. If Montesquieu is right, then it had been preparing from all time. Innumerable volumes have been written about its causes. There lies on the author's desk a six hundred page volume dealing with the intellectual causes alone, and another, almost equally bulky, dealing with the financial causes. Besides which, there were political, economic, social, historical, military, moral and spiritual causes. But which was the decisive factor? Some of the revolutionists seem to have thought that it was the financial crisis confronting the French government. "Oh, blessed deficit! Oh, my beloved Calonne!" exclaimed the ebullient Camille Desmoulins. This was likewise the opinion of some of the royalists. The royalist Rivarol writes that "the Revolution was made by the *rentiers*", who feared national bankruptcy.

Yet Madame de Staël is undoubtedly right when she says that "the Revolution was made by circumstances"—assuming that she means a combination of circum-

stances. The French government was by no means the only government in Europe that was on the verge of bankruptcy, nor was this the first time it found itself in such straits. The misery of the people was as great (or greater) in other European countries as it was in France. As for tyranny, about which so much was said during the Revolution, while, undoubtedly, it was bad enough, it was not worse in France than elsewhere. In 1787, the English traveller, Arthur Young, found it possible to say of the French government: "This is the mildest government of any considerable country in Europe, our own excepted". If, therefore, the Revolution broke out in France and not in some other European country, it was because some of the elements that made it inevitable in France were lacking elsewhere; and if it broke out in 1789, and not during some previous crisis, it was because some of the elements were lacking then. The decisive factor may have been a very minor one. If the French Guards had not so thoroughly hated their colonel—Duchâtelet—the Bastille might not have been taken and the court have prevailed over the people. Pascal has said that the career of Cromwell was stopped and the history of England changed by a grain of sand which lodged itself in the dictator's urinary tract. Duchâtelet may well have been the grain of sand of which the old régime died, changing the history of the world.

The historian Mathiez has remarked that great social upheavals are always the result of a lack of balance between the classes. The French middle class far outweighed the nobility in economic and social importance, yet found itself, politically, greatly inferior to its rival, who monopolized all the high offices in the army, the magistracy and the Church and was exempt from most forms of taxation. This, if it did not cause the

Revolution, furnished the basis for its success. But the programme of the middle class was not very revolutionary. It wanted a constitution assuring it political equality with the nobles, essential liberty, simplification and decentralization of the administrative system, and a Parliament that would vote upon laws and taxes. From this, to the abolition of the monarchy, the execution of the King, the "agrarian law" (the equal division of all landed property, which at one time during the Revolution became the object of a portion of the French proletariat), and Robespierre's and Saint-Just's proposal to confiscate the property of some 300,000 royalists and divide it among indigent republicans, is a far cry indeed! This accelerated pace of the Revolution was caused by an economic crisis, which brought forces into play that had been left out of the reckoning, and by the war.

The treaty with England, of 1786, had sacrificed French industry for the sake of French agriculture. Eventually French industry was benefited, since, in order to survive, it had to adopt the methods of its more progressive rival. But, in the meantime, French factories closed down and thousands were thrown out of work. Arthur Young tells us that in Lyon 20,000 of the 100,000 inhabitants were living on charity. Mirabeau says that in Paris—then a city of 600,000—there were 120,000 beggars! But though favoured by the government, French agriculture—employing three-fourths of the people of France—was just then treated as a stepchild by nature. In 1787, excessive rains, followed by floods, had ruined a good part of the crops, and the following year drought and hail cut down the harvest to about half its usual size. Bread became dearer than it had ever been during that century, and all sorts of ingredients having been mixed with the flour in

order to augment the quantity, the quality of the bread was such as to make it almost unfit for human consumption. The royalist Montjoie gives the following description of the poor man's principal article of diet at that time: "The bread was blackish, of an earthy taste, bitter, and causing inflammation of the throat and disorders of the bowels. I have seen some of a yellowish colour that gave forth a putrid odour and was so hard that it took repeated blows of an axe to detach a morsel."

Under these circumstances, what more natural than that great unrest should have prevailed among the masses, which were otherwise docile enough? Thus, owing to the fact that the economic crisis coincided with the financial and political crisis, the Third Estate, when it undertook its campaign against the court and the nobility, found the support which enabled it to carry out its programme. But when that programme had been realized, there still remained an economic crisis to deal with, for in the meantime war had broken out, the assignats had fallen and prices had soared far beyond the rise in wages. In some parts of France a day's wage would hardly buy a pound of bread. So the middle class, in its turn, became the object of attack and was forced to give ground. The government fell into the hands of a group of men—of whom Robespierre was the principal one—who subordinated the interests of the rich to those of the poor, and whose avowed purpose it was to make the poor richer, and the rich poorer. On the 9th of Thermidor the middle class struck back, and that date marks not only the fall of Robespierre, but the end of the first important experiment in modern history to rule a State primarily in the interest of human beings and with scant regard for the rights of property.

But while the Third and Fourth Estates together carried on the Revolution, the initial impulse, strangely enough, was given by the privileged classes themselves. For some time the King and his ministers had been at war with the nobility and the prelates, who bitterly resented the King's attempts to tax them—paying taxes being considered a mark of inferiority. They were supported in their stand by the magistracy—the *parlements*—who refused to register the King's decrees. It was they who, with fatal blindness, forced the calling of the States General.

The historian Aulard has said that of the 1200 deputies gathered at Versailles, Robespierre was probably the only one who foresaw that the movement would go far beyond the narrow limits the middle-class champions had marked out. He not only foresaw this, but was determined to help to carry it beyond those limits. If in the matter of tactics he sometimes reluctantly followed the masses, in the matter of vision he far preceded them. At the beginning of the Revolution the masses had neither vision nor programme. He had both.

II

The 4th of May, 1789, the road from Paris to Versailles was crowded with every conceivable kind of vehicle adaptable for human transportation, and with many on foot and on horseback. Paris was going to Versailles to witness the opening of the States General. The time was not far distant when Paris would sit—an uninvited guest—in the National Assembly, its uncouth, menacing presence often dominating the proceedings; but just now it was not unreasonably exacting. It considered taxes excessive, times hard, bread scarce and of poor quality, and naturally looked

to the deputies of the Third Estate to remedy these matters; but Necker was still its idol, it was respectful to the King and willing to cheer for the Duke of Orleans.

Later in the day Paris stood behind rows of French and Swiss guards and watched the procession wend its way towards the church of St. Louis, where the ceremonies were to take place. The representatives of the Third Estate came first, dressed in sombre black, with little black silk capes thrown about their shoulders. Next came the lower clergy, in soutanes; the bishops, in purple; the nobility, glittering with gold and wearing plumed hats; finally, the court. Paris cheered the Third Estate, remained silent as the clergy and nobility filed past (except a few vivas for Orleans), good-naturedly applauded fat, pompous Louis for staging the show, but treated the Queen with cold indifference.

Among the men in black Robespierre was one of the least conspicuous. Paris, whose idol he was to become eventually, had never even heard of him. The man whom the Parisians pointed out to each other was a homely man with a large head, the Count de Mirabeau, deputy from Aix-en-Provence, who, in spite of his title, had been elected by the Third Estate—a little irregularly, it was said. Paris had heard of his amorous escapades, his eloquence, his stormy career, his sojourn in several prisons, his quarrels with his father, and being stormy and amorous itself, was to take him to its somewhat fickle heart. It was to mourn his untimely end, reverently follow his body to the Panthéon, and later—having changed its mind about him—approvingly watch his remains taken from their honoured resting-place and flung unceremoniously into a lonely grave in an obscure cemetery.

When the procession had filed into the church and all had seated themselves, the choir intoned the

O salutaris hostia. Robespierre and his colleagues, though a little buoyed up by the cheering, were in a bad humour. The previous day they had been presented to the King in the royal bedchamber (as prescribed by court etiquette), while their colleagues of the nobility and clergy had made their bow in the reception hall. They resented the slight, as well as other slights put upon them, and their brows did not clear until the Bishop of Nancy—de la Fare—had mounted the pulpit and had got well into his sermon. His subject was unpromising enough: "Religion is the strength of empires and the happiness of the people"; but, lo! instead of shaking dry, ecclesiastical ashes from an urn, as they had expected him to do, he was pouring forth living wine! He spoke of the abuses of the old régime! He condemned the barbarities committed in the name of authority! A thrill went through the audience; and when in spite of the royal presence and the sacredness of the edifice the populace broke into applause, Robespierre and his colleagues joined in heartily. He thought the speech an excellent omen. If a bishop talked like that, then they could be certain of the support of a number of the lower clergy.

But when, on the 6th of May, they assembled in the Salle des Menus, they waited in vain for the nobility and clergy to join them, and were finally informed that they were meeting elsewhere, it being the intention of the government to regard each order as a separate chamber. To have submitted to this would have meant to have accepted defeat at the start, for with this arrangement the government would have been in a position to defeat any legislation proposed by the commoners that was not to its liking. They resolved not to yield.

There followed a struggle of which the chief incidents were the bold move of the commoners on the 17th

of June, when they declared themselves the National Assembly, and from which most historians date the beginning of the Revolution; and the meeting in the indoor tennis court, when they took the oath not to disband until they had given the country a constitution. In his famous painting of that memorable scene David shows Robespierre with both hands clasped against his breast, as if to restrain a too tumultuous beating of his heart. The gesture would have suited a Lafayette, but not the cold Fleming, who undoubtedly spoke the oath with the solemn self-restraint he would have considered appropriate to the occasion. Robespierre's strange posture is, however, not meant to be realistic, but symbolical of the fact that he is supposed to have regretted not having two hearts to give to his country.

During the struggle, the unknown deputy from Artois twice intervened in a manner prophetic of his future career. Since the clergy appeared far more tractable, he proposed that the Third Estate should first try to come to an understanding with them, and succeeding, both should make a united stand against the nobles. His proposal was not adopted, although receiving the approval of Mirabeau. It betrayed his tendency (which he never quite abandoned) of compromising with the Church whenever possible. Previous to this, he had appeared in the evangelical role to which he owed so much of his future success. The Archbishop of Aix had decided to make an attempt to overcome the resistance of the Third Estate by an emotional appeal, which was somewhat lacking in sincerity. Appearing in the tribune with a piece of the villainous bread Montjoie has described in his hand, he held it out to the deputies with an imploring gesture, beseeching them to yield, so that there might be no further delay in the voting of measures to relieve distress. He had hardly finished,

when Robespierre, having obtained the floor, thus addressed him:

"Go and tell your colleagues not to delay us further with such insincere appeals. If they are anxious to help the people, let them come and join us. Moreover, since you are the representative of a religion founded on contempt for riches, why not follow in the footsteps of your Divine Master? Why not abandon your display of luxury, which is an insult to the poor? Your canonical laws permit you to sell the very vessels on your altars to relieve distress, but you need not go so far as that. Dismiss your haughty lackeys, give up your costly equipages, divest yourselves of your sumptuous furnishings and following the example of the early Christians, bring relief to the poor with the money thus obtained."

Etienne Dumont, friend and secretary of Mirabeau, gives us an account of the scene in his memoirs, and says that a confused murmur of approval greeted the words. (Language so bold and defiant could, at that time, not yet command applause). "Who is he? Who is that young man?" deputies on the floor and spectators in the gallery asked one another. Reybaz, standing beside Dumont, said to the latter: "That young man has not had enough experience: he does not know when to stop. But there is eloquence at the bottom of him. He won't remain one of the crowd."

He was right, but before Robespierre would find himself, he would have a difficult period to live through. In spite of the experience gained in Arras, he felt self-conscious and awkward—not unlike a provincial actor might have felt on making his *début* before a metropolitan audience. During a conversation he had with Dumont, the latter noticed the constant nervous blinking of his eyes. He told Dumont that when he was to

speech he felt timid like a child, and trembled as he neared the tribune. No doubt he felt intimidated by the presence of so many brilliant men, but there was still another reason.

Soon after the nobles and clergy joined the Assembly, the deputies of the nobility of Artois, under the leadership of one de Beaumetz, deliberately set out to make life a burden to him. Whenever he would rise to speak, they would start whispering, shrug their shoulders contemptuously, smile mockingly, in fact do everything imaginable to confuse him and make him appear ridiculous. There was some ground for their ridicule. Other deputies, too, could not help feeling a trifle amused by his flowery style of oratory and his school-masterly manner. To a man who had winced at the failure of a farm labourer to return his greeting, this was little short of torture. To have his fine, polished sentences, worked over so sedulously, greeted with amusement; what a humiliation for one of literary pretensions, the prize essayist of the Academy of Metz!

The newspapers, too, were unkind to him at that time. Usually they would make no mention of his speeches whatever, or would condense them into half a dozen lines. If they mentioned his name at all, they would invariably misspell it, calling him Robert-Pierre, or Robetzpierre. More often, they contented themselves with asterisks, or referred to him as "a deputy", or "one of the deputies".

As a result of all this, he drew even more within himself and his ironic little smile grew increasingly bitter.

III

It has been said of Robespierre that he lacked the gift of friendship. It is a fact that many of his friend-

ships suffered lamentable shipwreck on the reef of politics. Pétion, Charles and Alexander Lameth, Duport-Dutertre, Madame Roland, Danton, Desmoulins, Panis—all, at one time, were his friends, and with all he broke sooner or later. The historian Louis Blanc has said that Robespierre had no friends, only blind supporters. He himself, towards the end of his career, is reported to have exclaimed: "I have no friends, except Augustin—a child, and Couthon—a cripple!"

The friendships he lost are, however, somewhat counterbalanced by those he kept. Lepeletier, Saint-Just, Lebas, Couthon, the Duplay family, David, Buonarroti, Buissart, Madame de Chalabre remained his friends until death parted them. If some, like David, Madame de Chalabre and Buissart, renounced him after his death, it was for the reason that Peter denied Christ—to escape consequences. And if the Duplays, David, Madame de Chalabre, and perhaps Couthon might be called "blind supporters", the term hardly befits Buissart, Saint-Just, Lebas and Buonarroti, whose own firmness of character unfitted them for such a role. Saint-Just, far from being a blind supporter, on several occasions—notably the arrest of Danton and Desmoulins—seems to have forced his hand. Buissart did not hesitate to criticize him and to proffer advice which he knew to be in conflict with Robespierre's own views.

If, however, by friendship is meant a feeling akin to love, then it is probably true that Robespierre lacked the gift of friendship. It is difficult to conceive him as giving himself over unreservedly to that warmth of confidence friendship requires. Whether his habitual reserve—bordering on frigidity—was due to a sense of haughty intellectual superiority, or a Pharisaical assumption of superior virtue, as claimed by some,

is, however, highly questionable. Modern psychology tends to indicate that it was due to inner timidity—a fear of being emotionally hurt, which may well have resulted from his father's somewhat irregular conduct and his losses by death in early childhood. Yet, there are indications that, at one time, he cherished a feeling bordering upon affection for Desmoulins, and especially for Danton. There is in existence a letter—written by him to Danton and quoted later in this volume—in which, with apparent sincerity, he professes his affection for him. He defended Danton publicly as late as December, 1793, when the latter was already in such bad odour that to do so meant wellnigh to become suspect himself. When Danton's arrest was first proposed in the Committee of Public Safety, he is said to have risen in a rage and objected. The very fierceness with which he assailed him when finally he "consented to abandon him" speaks of love bitterly disappointed in the object of its affection. He defended Desmoulins repeatedly, risking his popularity to get him reinstated at the Jacobin Club, after he had been expelled. His conception of public duty—fostered by his classical education—and the challenge given to it by his stern disciple Saint-Just, did not permit him, however, to place loyalty to friendship ahead of loyalty to a cause.

It should likewise be considered that while in ordinary times men can belong to opposite political camps, yet respect each other's principles and remain friends, this becomes a very difficult matter in times of civil war. At such times, to belong to opposite camps means to engage in a death grapple. It was under such circumstances that many of his friendships were broken.

IV

Robespierre's principal friends in Versailles were Pétion, Charles and Alexander Lameth, and Lepeletier de Saint-Fargeau. All were about his own age, or a little older, and deputies to the Assembly. The three last-named were marquises, and had been delegated by the nobility, but, nevertheless, belonged to the Left. We will make a passing acquaintance with each one of the four.

Jérôme Pétion was a lawyer from the cathedral town of Chartres. In the Constituent Assembly he and Robespierre were so closely associated that one was seldom mentioned without the other. During that time they stood equally high in the affection of the Paris populace. But after the adjournment of the Assembly, Pétion had the misfortune of being elected Mayor of Paris. His official duty required him to oppose all illegal attempts against constituted authority, and it was precisely that channel the Revolution was forced to take. Hence he lost the confidence of the revolutionists. At the elections for the Convention he became the candidate of the Gironde against Robespierre, and was overwhelmingly defeated by him. Elected from another constituency, he became Robespierre's bitter opponent.

In fairness to Robespierre it must be said that he did not attack his former friend until the latter had previously started hostilities. Pétion was no match for him at all. Exceedingly vain, he laid himself open to ridicule, and Robespierre was not slow in seizing the advantage. When the arrest of the Gironde leaders was voted, Pétion fled with a number of his colleagues. His body and that of the Girondin Buzot were found in a field near Bordeaux, partly devoured by wolves or famished

have distorted his judgment in a matter of that kind.

If the Lameths were of the school of Montesquieu, Robespierre's other aristocratic friend, Michel Lepeletier, was of the school of Rousseau, which means that he was considerably more to the Left than the Lameths. This accounts for the fact that he and Robespierre remained friends until Lepeletier's death in February, 1793. Lepeletier, like Pétion, was later elected to the Convention, and voted for the death of the King. He was exceedingly wealthy, but a sincere idealist, anxious to abolish most of the privileges of which he himself was a beneficiary. He is the author of one of the most radical pieces of legislation introduced during the revolutionary period. It called for compulsory rearing, by the State, of all boys from their seventh to their twelfth year, and of all girls from their seventh to their eleventh year, under conditions of absolute equality.

Lepeletier was assassinated on the day of the King's execution by a former member of the royal bodyguard. When after his friend's death Robespierre was shown the manuscript of his educational plan, he exclaimed: "It is admirable! It is the only thing written worthy of the Revolution." He offered to champion the plan before the Convention, and did so. It was adopted, but with the compulsory clause struck out, which deprived it of its revolutionary meaning. It was never put into operation, even in the amended form.

v

Upon their arrival in Versailles, Robespierre and his Third Estate colleagues from Artois had taken lodgings at the modest *Hostellerie du Renard*, in the *Rue Ste. Elisabeth*. Later, he and three other deputies from

his province rented a small apartment at No. 16 Rue de l'Étang.

His mornings, and occasionally his evenings, Robespierre spent at the Assembly. His afternoons and part of his nights he devoted to the preparation of his speeches. Unwittingly, de Beaumetz probably did him a favour, for the sharp point of ridicule had, no doubt, much to do with his abandonment of the flowery style of oratory that had excited the risibility of his colleagues. Aulard, who has made a special study of the principal orators of the Revolution, is of the opinion that he did not reach his full oratorical growth until the Assembly had been in Paris for some time.

There are marked differences of opinion about Robespierre as an orator, so marked, in fact, that they are obviously coloured by partisan feeling. Carlyle finds him "barren as the Harnathon wind". Taine says that "he said nothing and only spoke to hear himself speak". Belloc says that "he lacked great phrase". Aulard finds him, at times, eloquent and convincing. Mathiez considers him superior to Vergniaud.

When one reads his speeches one cannot help thinking that Reybaz' criticism was justified: he did not know when to stop. Most of them are too long. He has a way of repeating himself, but as Michelet has remarked, *viva voce* this could not have been nearly as objectionable as it appears in reading. In fact, it had the advantage of emphasizing the argument. Parts of some of his speeches are deserving of Carlyle's withering strictures, but there are other parts—and even whole speeches—that are undeniably eloquent, and of which the logic is devastating. It has already been said that he usually read his speeches, but he was quite capable of speaking impromptu, and at such times was often at his best. His famous sally against Briez and his attack on Danton,

both delivered on the spur of the moment, are touched with sombre grandeur.

It is from his influence on his audiences that we must judge him as an orator, and that influence has seldom been equalled. It will perhaps be said that his popularity was due to the fact that he catered to the passions and prejudices of the crowd, but such is far from being the case. The fact is that he showed great moral courage in combating public opinion, when he considered it to have taken the wrong course. His anti-war speeches were delivered in the teeth of mad war hysteria. He stood practically alone barring the way to anti-religious fanaticism, and managed to turn the tide. In an irreligious age he was not afraid to brave derision and publicly declare at the Jacobin Club that "Providence watched over the Revolution". His influence in the Convention was extraordinary, yet no man braved it more openly.

While his strength was mainly in his logic, he also knew how to play upon the chord of emotion. The attraction of his speeches to women, who flocked to hear him speak, alone testifies to this. On one occasion, at the Jacobin Club, we find the audience rising to its feet like one man, and shouting: "We'll all die with *vroul*!" On another (as told by Desmoulins in a letter to his father), half the audience—men as well as women—was in tears.

But it was not only the emotional chord he knew how to set vibrating, but likewise the spiritual chord. Condorcet has said that the Revolution was a religion. The Cordeliers might smash crucifixes, but they worshipped the heart of Marat! Others might desecrate the altars of the Church, but only to seek devotional compensation at "Altars of the Fatherland". No revolutionary orator was as fitted to interpret the spiritual

side of the Revolution as Robespierre. His personal rectitude made it possible for him to give voice to sentiments that in the mouth of any other would have sounded hypocritical. It was given to him to turn the religious sentiment engendered by the social upheaval into Puritan channels. The last phase of the Revolution is stamped unmistakably with his personality. Condorcet and Rabaut Saint-Etienne have both called him a priest, and, indeed, there was a good deal of the evangelist about him. It was the spiritual note in Robespierre's speeches that gave him much of his prestige.

Many of his speeches are characterized by great bitterness towards his political opponents. They do not give evidence of a charitable disposition. Yet, in private as well as public life, he does not appear to have been uncharitable. His bark was often worse than his bite. It is characteristic of him that he often used uncharitable language when attempting to perform a charitable act. His contemptuous reference to Madame Elisabeth—the King's sister—whom he tried to save from the fury of the extremists, is a striking example. Reubell has said of him: "I have but one fault to find with Robespierre, it is that he was too kind-hearted". Madame Lebas, who came in daily contact with him, says in her memoirs, which bear such a stamp of sincerity: "He was so good!" He loved children and animals. The little Savoyard boys, in the garden of the Tuileries, for whom he always brought coppers along, called him "*le bon monsieur*". Yet, one is forced to remark that while his outlook upon issues was usually broad and politic, and shows him to have possessed qualities of true statesmanship, his insight into men and their motives appears frequently narrow and lays him open to the charge of sectarianism and fanaticism. He lacked that largeness of spirit which, on occasion, character-

ized Danton and would have made the latter truly admirable had he been less corrupt.

Robespierre's intransigence and the too great reliance he placed upon his oratory accomplished his undoing. He came to the Convention on the 9th of Thermidor, says Aulard, armed with nothing but a roll of paper, when he might have brought an army along.

In Versailles, when the Assembly did not meet in the evening, he would usually go to the Café Amaury—which is still in existence, under the name of the Brasserie Muller, and is located on the corner of the Avenue St. Cloud and the Boulevard Carnot. He went there principally to attend the meetings of the Breton Club, which met at the café and later gave birth to the Jacobin Club. When the meeting was over, he would establish himself in a corner (which the café management has marked with a tablet) and ruminate over a glass of wine or discuss politics with his friends. Occasionally, no doubt, he took walks in the surrounding country and meditated in the spirit of Rousseau.

VI

Who has not read the story of the storming of the Bastille? As told by Carlyle or Michelet, it is a gallant tale. Since historians have started looking for the economic nigger in the historical woodpile, it is thought, however, that financiers like Laborde, Boscary and Dufresnoy—not usually mentioned among the heroes of the Bastille—bear as great a responsibility for the capture of the feudal stronghold as Elie, Maillard or Hullin. They are said to have been worried about the dismissal of Necker, which, they feared, meant national bankruptcy, and hence to have proceeded to a judicious distribution of cash among men capable of firing the

people. Thus the Third Estate brought the Fourth Estate into play in order to gain its ends, until one day it discovered that it had raised a Frankenstein.

Robespierre's friend Camille Desmoulins is usually given credit for having started the movement that culminated in the storming of the Bastille. He was not a member of the Assembly but an impecunious lawyer in Paris. He often went to Versailles, however, not so much to see Robespierre, as to visit Mirabeau, whom (he himself tells us) he "loved like a mistress". He happened to be in Versailles when Necker was dismissed and immediately hastened back to Paris and made his appearance in the Palais-Royal, which was not then the mournful place it is to-day, but the pulsating heart of Paris, where fashion, vice, gaming and politics found colourful expression. In its garden were a number of cafés and in one of these—the Café du Foy—Desmoulins mounted a table and made an inflammatory speech, in which he told of the dismissal of Necker and spoke warningly of the danger of the King's mercenaries gathered on the Champ-de-Mars. There followed a procession through the city and a minor riot. The following day, however, the rioting was resumed, and the day after the Bastille was stormed.

With all of this Robespierre had nothing to do. He was in Versailles, where the rumours reaching the Assembly were so alarming that it declared itself in permanent session and did not adjourn for three days and nights. Pale, haggard, prey to many conflicting emotions, the deputies continued to deliberate as messengers came and went and the news grew ever more disturbing. There had been clashes between the soldiers and the working men of the suburbs. . . . The tocsin was being sounded. . . . Paris was arming. . . . The *Invalides* had been invaded and rifles and cannon

taken. . . . The French Guards had gone over to the people. . . . The Bastille was being stormed. . . . The Bastille was taken. . . . De Launay, Commander of the Bastille, had been killed and his head was being paraded on a pike. . . .

Rumour, of course, outdid the truthful news: Paris was in flames. . . . A hundred thousand Parisians were marching upon Versailles. . . . There had been a wholesale massacre. . . .

The rumours that the Parisians were determined to make a visit to the King unless he came to visit Paris, persisted, and after a few days, Louis, with many misgivings, undertook the journey. He was accompanied by several hundred deputies, among whom was Robespierre, who gives an interesting account of the trip in a letter to his friend Buissart, in Arras. What especially struck him was that the populace shouted "Long live the Nation!" but seldom "Long live the King!" He saw monks with the national cockade pinned to their cassocks, rifles on their shoulders; and on the steps of a church, a priest, in the midst of his flock, with the cockade pinned to his stole.

Louis returned to Versailles that same evening feeling somewhat like an inexperienced animal trainer who has managed to escape unhurt from a cageful of jungle beasts. Robespierre remained in Paris a few days longer, visited the gloomy interior of the Bastille and made his appearance in the Palais-Royal. Wherever he went he was cheered, but it was the deputy's regalia they cheered, not Robespierre. Paris still did not know him.

VII

The storming of the Bastille was followed by other acts of violence, such as the lynching of Foulon and his

son-in-law, Bertier, in Paris, and rioting in the provinces. The peasants went on a rampage. They invaded the castles and made bonfires of all the parchment and paper paraphernalia—the charters, letters patent, writs, grants, titles and deeds whose magic power (so they thought) had so long kept them in subjection. Occasionally, however, they burned the castle itself and for good measure killed the lord.

This was going much further than the Third Estate wished things to go. The Revolution, which had progressed as if it were with eyes raised towards the stars—in the manner of Joan of Arc seeing visions—was beginning to look rather hoydenish. Her robe was no longer spotless but scorched and bloodstained. The more conservative among the Third Estate deputies were taking fright. Soon they were to refuse to follow. Mirabeau, Barnave, the Lameths and other important leaders still remained loyal. “The blood that is being spilled is not guiltless blood”, said Barnave. But, eventually, they too would turn away. Robespierre would not.

Yet he was no believer in violence. It was contrary to his temperament and to his method. He never advocated it, and on the single occasion when he gave his consent (the storming of the Tuileries), circumstances were such that a short cut had to be taken no matter what the risk. At all other times he was loath to trust the cause he stood for to the accidents of a street battle, and mob violence against individuals never gained his approval.

His method was ceaseless, unrelenting propaganda, by means of which, he felt, the enemy's defences could be undermined and weakened to such an extent that they would be abandoned without a struggle. He followed that method consistently throughout the Revolu-

tion, and it must be conceded that results justified his faith in its efficacy. Does anybody imagine that the capture of an old fortress by a Paris mob would have settled the fate of feudalism if the latter had not previously been undermined to an extent which made it incapable of effective resistance? Does anybody believe that monarchy would have fallen on the 10th of August, 1792, as a result of the encounter of a handful of Swiss and another mob, if it had not previously been deprived of all its supports? Yet on both occasions the patient work of years was placed in jeopardy.

But to deplore outbursts of violence on the part of the people and to favour their suppression by the very authorities whose despotic reign provoked those outbursts are two different matters. Robespierre did not approve of the lynching of Foulon and Bertier, but neither does he appear to have lost much sleep over it. The unfortunate Foulon probably never did say that the people should eat grass, but he represented the old régime at its worst. The manner of his death—which caused consternation in the ranks of the Third Estate deputies—affected Robespierre so little that he considered it worth only half a line in a letter to Buissart. As for the peasant revolts, when Lally-Tollendal got up in the Assembly and demanded that stern measures be taken against the rioters, the little lawyer from Arras—who had written a pamphlet in which he stigmatized violence used against the peasants—was on his feet and had this to say:

“What has happened that moves Monsieur Lally-Tollendal to sound the tocsin? You speak of riots? Those riots, gentlemen, are but manifestations of the spirit of liberty. Do not deceive yourselves. The struggle is not yet ended. To-morrow, perhaps, will witness a renewal of the court’s sinister designs. Who will frus-

trate them if we begin by declaring rebels those who have armed themselves for our salvation?"

Thus he defended the Revolution, though there was no denying the fact that her ways were becoming hoydenish. There certainly was no denying it after that mad 5th and 6th of October, 1789, which mark an important turning-point in French history and in Robespierre's career.

VIII

On the morning of the 5th of October, a young girl rushed into the guardroom of the St. Eustache quarter in Paris, seized a drum, rushed out again and began to beat it, shouting: "Follow me! Follow me! To the City Hall!"

They followed. Haggard women with starving children at home, broad-hipped, strong-limbed women of the Halles, ill-nourished slaves and shopgirls and seamstresses, women of the street, whose sorry trade, too, had suffered as a result of the hard times, and young girls out for a lark. When men tried to join them, they drove them off. Men were cowards! They would attend to this themselves. But every woman they met on their way had to come along on pain of having her hair cut off.

At the City Hall there was no one to receive them. But prisoners were there and they freed them; documents were there and they tore them up; pistols and rifles and pikes and a couple of cannon were there and they took them. Then, on the steps of the City Hall, a tall, swarthy figure in black. It was Maillard, one of the heroes of the Bastille. Hurrah for Maillard! When not storming the Bastille he was a business agent, solemn, tragic-looking. He asked them what they wanted. Bread, of course! And if none was to be had, then they would

go to Versailles and ask the King to come and live in Paris. With the King in Paris there would be bread. Such was their simple faith in royalty.

After some hesitation he decided to put himself at their head. He might be able to keep them from mischief, and in the meantime the authorities could take precautions. They started. First came the gigantic, black-coated figure of Maillard; then, some half-dozen women drummers; then, like a figure out of some pageant, a scarlet-gowned woman on horseback, a plumed hat on her flowing raven hair, a pike in her hand. It was Théroigne de Méricourt, an adventuress, who, though far from being a virgin, no doubt imagined herself a revolutionary Joan of Arc. Then, some eight thousand women, carrying rifles, pikes, halberds, pistols, clubs—any sort of weapon—and pulling the cannon. Then, a detachment of the victors of the Bastille—working men from the suburbs.

It had begun to rain and a cold wind was blowing. They set their faces hard and trudged through the mud, in the wake of the brave roll of the drums, the black Maillard, the scarlet Théroigne. When they came to Sèvres they halted, but found only eight loaves of bread and a few bottles of wine. Eight loaves for eight thousand and no God to perform a miracle! Finally, however, they reached Versailles and the building in which the Assembly was in session.

The Assembly was incensed against the King who refused to sign the measures it had passed. Moreover, the court had had the imprudence to give a banquet to the officers of the King's bodyguard and those of the regiment of Flanders, during which the white cockade of the Bourbons and the black Austrian cockade had been proudly worn and the national cockade had been insulted and trampled underfoot. That day Robespierre

had spoken, saying: "There is but one way to meet obstacles—smash them!" And Mirabeau, amidst thunderous applause, had shouted that, if the Assembly would declare none but the person of the King inviolable, he would denounce in writing those responsible for the orgy at the palace—ay, unto the Queen herself!

But, while they had applauded Robespierre's and Mirabeau's radical utterances, the deputies of the Third Estate (not to speak of the others) were not at all charitably inclined towards the bedraggled mob that now made its noisy appearance before the building. Mirabeau himself, when news of the march of the women had reached him by private messenger, had slipped behind the President's chair and had whispered to him: "Feign that you are ill. Go to the palace. Tell them, if you wish, that you have it from me: Paris is marching on us. There is not a moment to lose!" It was as if now, for the first time, the deputies of the Third Estate fully realized the danger that threatened their own class if the spirit of revolution were allowed to set into ferment the lower strata of society. Many of them, from that day on, decided to call a halt and drew closer to the King. But Robespierre did not want the Revolution curbed. He looked at the bedraggled women, at the faces that spoke of privation, and thought that it must go on and on until the living conditions of just such people as these had been greatly improved. When Maillard made his appeal to the Assembly and some of the deputies heckled him, he came to his aid. Incisive, deadly in earnest, he made himself the advocate of the populace. For the first time Paris and Robespierre looked each other eye to eye. Paris would not forget!

At midnight, Versailles, that had seen so much excitement that day, was wakened by renewed roll of drums—Lafayette at the head of fifteen thousand men.

The enthusiasm of the women had communicated itself to the Paris National Guard, which had insisted that its commander, Lafayette, lead it to Versailles. He had argued, pleaded—all to no avail. The men had become rebellious and had even threatened to hang him. Finally he had yielded, and towards six o'clock they had started. But in the wake of the army trailed a sinister crowd: men disguised as women, thieves, vagabonds—all the riff-raff of Paris that thought there might be disorder and a chance to loot.

Arrived at the palace, Lafayette was admitted to the King, who stood, much worried, surrounded by a few of the court. Lafayette bowed, both hands pressed against his breast, and said:

"Sire, you see before you the most unhappy of men. If I believed I could have served your Majesty better to-day by losing my head upon the scaffold, your Majesty would not see me here."

Then he assumed full responsibility, disposed his soldiers about the palace, and went off to bed at the mansion of his brother-in-law, de Noailles.

At dawn, while he was still sleeping—and, incidentally earning the title of "General Morpheus" with which the royalists henceforth honoured him—the mob invaded the palace, killed several of the bodyguard, started to loot. He awoke in time to prevent worse from happening. Later, he appeared on the balcony with the Queen and kissed Marie Antoinette's hand in view of the crowd, which, being French, applauded the gallant picture they made.

That afternoon there moved on the road between Versailles and Paris the maddest serio-comic procession that ever was seen. Soldiers with loaves of bread stuck upon their bayonets; girls and women, wearing soldiers' hats, astride horses and cannon; the King's

bodyguard, hatless and without arms; the royal household, in carriages—Lafayette riding by the side of the berlin in which were the King and his immediate family; and trudging gaily through the mud and splashing through water puddles, a heterogeneous crowd of men, women and boys, carrying all sorts of weapons and branches torn from trees, with their yellow, brown and red autumn foliage. Among them was a bearded giant—a model from the Latin Quarter dressed in Roman cuirass—who had that morning decapitated two corpses of bodyguards with an axe he was carrying.

The Assembly voted to follow the King to Paris.

CHAPTER FOUR

PARIS

I

HE was in Paris, scene of his early struggles, his early loves. Who was she, the only woman who, with any certainty, we know to have shared his bed? We know neither her name nor what she looked like, only that she became his mistress soon after he moved to Paris, that she was about twenty-six and very much in love with him, that he treated her rather coldly and often refused to see her, and that he gave her one-fourth of his salary of eighteen francs a day.

Half of the remainder of his salary he sent to Charlotte and Augustin in Arras, who, judging by their letters, had a rather difficult time of it. "We lack everything. Please remember our wretched little household", writes Augustin. And Charlotte: "Please send me what you promised, dear brother; we are still in great need".

When these donations had been made there remained not quite seven francs a day for him to live on. Little wonder that he usually dined for thirty sous, and that when Benjamin Franklin died and the Assembly decreed three days' mourning, he was compelled to borrow a black suit, his wardrobe, at that time, not extending beyond the one he was wearing. The owner of the borrowed suit was a taller man than he, and, particular as he was about his appearance, it must have given him some embarrassment to wear the ill-fitting garments.

He shared lodgings with a young man of his acquaintance, a certain Pierre Villiers, at No. 8 (now No. 64) Rue de Saintonge. Villiers was away all day and in the evening served as his secretary, gratis. Several of Robespierre's manuscripts are in his handwriting and he answered, no doubt, much of the correspondence which, as his friend's popularity grew, became quite voluminous. During a single month, quite early in his career, his postage amounted to over 271 francs. The deputies had franking privileges, having to submit the addressed envelope for verification, a fruitful source of graft for some.

In his memoirs, Villiers falls in with the critical attitude regarding Robespierre, then more prevalent than now, as a result of a deliberate attempt on the part of the panic-stricken ultra-terrorists, chiefly responsible for his fall, to make him the scapegoat. Nevertheless, he does his friend the justice of saying that, although he often lacked the bare necessities of life, he yet refused all offers of monetary assistance. Admirers would write to him and offer him money, "asking nothing in return, not even a thank you", but he would refuse, and when Villiers remonstrated, would get angry.

Once an English woman, Miss Freeman Shepherd—a minor novelist at that time—sent him a draft, asking him to use it for some public purpose. But he drew the line sharply and refused, at which the lady showed considerable annoyance, accusing him of lack of gallantry.

The court and the Duke of Orleans expended—for separate ends—vast sums, not a little of which found its way into the pockets of the deputies. Dubois-Grancé charges that at one time as many as a hundred deputies were bribed. Robespierre was offered a considerable sum under the pretence that it was meant for charitable

disbursement by him. He curtly replied that the generous donor had better attend to the distribution of his largesse himself. Another time, when an emissary was sent to him on a similar mission, he replied not at all, merely staring the man out of countenance, until he withdrew in confusion.

He was equally impervious to social favours or to feminine seduction. He now received many invitations, but, whether from a realization of the danger lurking in too intimate and frequent a contact with those whose chief interest in him was the desire that he should abandon his principles, or whether by nature a recluse, he seldom took advantage of such social opportunities. His principal friends remained Pétion, Duport-Dutertre, the Lameths and Lepeletier. They called at one another's lodgings and met at the cafés. Madame de Staël mentions in her memoirs having met him one evening, in 1789, at the home of her father, the Finance Minister, Necker. He was then merely an unknown lawyer from the provinces, who happened to be a deputy, and was known to have a somewhat exaggerated notion of democracy.

He would occasionally go to the theatre, usually to the Théâtre Français (now the Odéon). "He liked", says Lamartine—who received the information from Elisabeth Duplay—"the declamatory tragedies that dealt with the tribune, tyranny, the people, resounding crime and virtue." Apparently he did not seek in the theatre relaxation from his everyday work, but rather a poetical interpretation and idealization of it. To him life itself was a stage on which he had cast himself for the stirring role of people's tribune.

II

Two places there were in Paris where the drama of the Revolution was now to unfold itself principally: the Assembly and the Jacobin Club. In both, Robespierre was to play an increasingly important part, and finally the principal role.

The Assembly established itself in Paris in the Salle du Manège, a former riding school. No trace of the building, from which flowed a rejuvenating current through the desiccated veins of the old France, remains. It stood on the crossing of what is now the Rue Castiglione and the Rue de Rivoli. The gloomy space within was long and narrow. At one end, on a dais, sat the chairman, elected every fortnight, and six secretaries. About the middle of the hall, facing the chairman, was the tribune, the occupants of which were thus forced to show their backs to the greater part of their audience.

At either end of the hall was a public gallery, and on either side, a reserved gallery, divided into boxes, as at the theatre. Since there were thousands out of work in Paris, and interest in the proceedings was intense, the public gallery was usually crowded. The reserved gallery, at the beginning of the Revolution, often held a select audience. The spectators applauded or booed the speakers usually with impunity and not infrequently interjected remarks of their own. Mirabeau-Tonneau, younger brother of the great Mirabeau—nicknamed thus because of his voluminous girth—who was a very choleric gentleman, once went looking for a ladder, wanting, sword in hand, to storm the public gallery, which that day happened to be particularly uncomplimentary to him.

The political group to which Robespierre belonged

was the extreme Left. It consisted of only about thirty deputies. Its influence in the Assembly was naturally small, but it made up for this by its popularity with the public gallery and the Paris populace. Robespierre's success with the gallery was undoubtedly responsible for the rather curious notion he formed of the conditions under which the National Parliament should meet. "A vast, majestic edifice," he said, "open to 12,000 spectators, should be the meeting-place of the legislative body. Before so large a number of witnesses neither corruption, perfidy, nor intrigue would dare to raise their heads. The general good alone would be considered. The voice of reason and of public interest alone would be heard."

To this, one might object that under such conditions the Parliament would be in danger of being tyrannized over by an active, well-organized minority. But even without a gallery of such huge proportions, some 5000 Parisian radicals managed to impose their will upon the National Assembly a good part of the time.

III

The second great arena—the Jacobin Club—likewise had its origin in Versailles. The hardy, practically-minded Breton deputies had, upon their arrival in Versailles, formed a Club, which met at the Café Amaury, where they discussed measures coming up in the Assembly. It was soon noticed that, whereas deputies from other provinces voted according to individual inclination, the Bretons usually voted as a unit. Interest in the Club grew and soon others asked to be admitted. The Bretons were not clannish and welcomed every one with views similar to their own. Nearly all those with advanced opinions finally joined, including nobles like

Lafayette and de Noailles—the wealthiest noble in France. The influence of the Club was considerable, for not only was it organized for concerted action in the Assembly, but it had sympathizers at court and in the ministerial offices, thus keeping well informed on what was going on behind the scenes.

When the Assembly moved to Paris, the Club was reorganized, with the “Triumvirate”—Duport-Barnave-Lameth—as principal sponsors. They secured, as meeting-place, the refectory of the Dominican monastery in the Rue St. Honoré, at a rental of 200 francs a year, and an equal amount for the use of the furniture. The Dominicans were known in Paris as the Jacobins, owing to the fact that their first monastery in Paris was located in the Rue St. Jacques. Later, the hall was found inadequate, and the library above the chapel was rented. Finally, in March, 1792—monastic orders having been abolished—the use of the chapel itself was obtained from the government.

There is an etching in existence showing Robespierre in the tribune at the Jacobin Club, in 1791, when the Club was still meeting at the library. The hall is long, narrow, with vaulted ceiling and deep window embrasures. The auditors' benches—parallel with the lateral walls—are provided with a back rest. Down the middle of the hall is a passage, to the left of which, in the centre, is a dais on which stands the chairman's desk and a table for secretaries. On the right, fronting the chairman, is the orators' tribune—a tall, box-like contrivance, which elevated the speaker well above his audience.

Originally the Club admitted only deputies, and, at one time, as many as 400 belonged. Then it was decided to make authors who had written a book conducive to public welfare likewise eligible, and Condorcet as

the first to be admitted. Still later, membership was extended to the general public, each applicant having to be vouched for by six members. Even then, however, the Club remained, for some time, a dignified body composed of politicians, professional men and substantial burghers—not unlike some such institution as the Academy of Arras, an organization, therefore, in which Robespierre would feel peculiarly at home. He did, in fact, feel more at home there than in the Assembly, there being less interruption and contradiction to contend with. An atmosphere of undivided attention was, if not indispensable, yet greatly favourable to his peculiar didactic form of address.

The name "Jacobins", given the organization, half in derision, was, at first, frowned on by its members, by Robespierre in particular, the official name being "The Friends of the Constitution". Not until the fall of the monarchy was "Jacobins" officially adopted.

Little by little, however, the Club began to transform itself, taking on a more proletarian aspect. That the transformation already began in 1791 is shown by the fact that, when that year the Jacobin dissenters organized the Feuillants, they took care to exclude all "passive" citizens (those too poor to pay taxes), which would indicate that they considered them largely responsible for the wicked ways into which the Jacobins had fallen.

It is interesting to note that the transformation did not diminish, but rather increased the appetite for Robespierre's pulpit style of oratory. His listeners might not always have been able to follow his classical allusions, and his long, didactic addresses sometimes must have bored them a little, but perhaps for that very reason they admired them all the more. It is no uncommon phenomenon that he who places himself above

the crowd and speaks a language loftier than its own, exercises a greater influence than he who is, or pretends to be, of the crowd and speaks its vulgar accents.

His appearance was in keeping with his oratory. Not for him the outfit of the *sans-culotte*! No red cap for his powdered hair! At the height of the Revolution, when *sans-cullotism* ran rampant, he appeared before the people immaculate, almost elegant, a figure of the old régime, voicing the ideas of the new, and the contrast between his appearance and those ideas made them even more striking. His very elegance seemed like a subtle compliment to his listeners. It is even quite likely that he meant it to be just that—a mark of respect. If he did not really love the people, because love was foreign to his nature, he respected them. To him the people were the Sovereign, and he appeared before them as one appears before one's sovereign—suitably attired. And there was no hidden side to his life—no shameful past or vicious private existence to cast a doubt upon the words he was uttering. They knew that the good clothes he wore were all his possessions, that his life was an open book. Hence they trusted and respected him, and his words carried authority.

IV

Soon after the formation of the Paris Jacobin Club, similar clubs sprang up in the provinces, and affiliated with the Paris organization, with which they kept up regular correspondence. In August, 1790, there were already 156 such clubs, and at the height of the Revolution—Aulard estimates—there were over 1000. The combined membership has been roughly estimated at from 200,000 to 300,000, which appears somewhat excessive, considering that, in November,

1791, the Paris Club had only 1211 members.

A very important factor in the growth of the organization was the sale of Church lands. Between April, 1791, and September of that same year, when Church property was put up for sale that brought some 800,000,000 francs into the national treasury, the Jacobins experienced their greatest growth, some 600 new branches being organized during August and September alone. The connection is easily perceivable. Those who had invested their savings—frequently their all—in Church property, had by that very act hitched their fortunes to the revolutionary chariot. A serious reaction might not only mean the loss of their possessions, but reprisals as well. Hence they became willing candidates for membership in a society whose purpose it was to carry on the Revolution and combat reaction.

It should be remarked that the Church lands were sold in large tracts and were often bought by speculators, who acquired them for resale. This had the effect of depriving the poor of most of the benefits of the measure, and the further effect of turning such speculators into rabid Jacobins. The influence of such revolutionary profiteers was, in the end, very detrimental to the Club.

A great many analogies can be drawn between the French and Russian Revolutions, not the least of which is that between the Jacobin Clubs and the Soviets. The functions of the Jacobin Clubs did not differ greatly from those of the Soviets during the active stage of the Russian Revolution. They served as centres of instruction for the workmen and peasants, fanned the enthusiasm for the Revolution, kept a watchful eye upon the aristocrats, assisted the government (when once it had passed into Jacobin hands) in having its

decrees obeyed, helped to make requisitions for the army, prevented the reaction from organizing, and, in 1794, designated all candidates for office. From December, 1793, until Robespierre's fall, France was ruled by a Jacobin dictatorship. It may be said that both the Fascist and Communist dictatorships have made use of a perfected Jacobin method.

The Constituent Assembly and its successors, the Legislative Assembly and the Convention, stood in awe of the Clubs. The first took a few timid and ineffectual steps to curb them, but soon resigned itself to the inevitable, while the second never got beyond a mere gesture. The Paris Club was able to raise a mob almost at will to intimidate the deputies, and deputies from the provinces feared, besides, the reception they might receive from the Jacobins at home and the immediate danger to their families and property.

It cannot be said that anybody in particular was instrumental in organizing this network of Clubs. Marat must be given credit for being the first to advocate it, and the Masonic Lodges often served as a nucleus. The growth, however, was largely spontaneous. When Robespierre became the leading figure at the Jacobin Club, there already existed a powerful organization of some 400 Clubs. He had but to use the formidable political machine placed at his disposal, as Napoleon had but to use the great military force he inherited from the Revolution.

v

As a member of the Constituent Assembly, Robespierre may be said to have taken for watchword Rousseau's "The people is King!" and to have fought for almost every conceivable measure tending to place

power in the hands of the common people. In this he was far less equivocal than Rousseau, who sometimes contradicts himself and shows strong leanings towards the middle class—"those between the rich and the poor, who constitute the soundest part of the republic, the only part upon which one can rely to have no other object in view except the well-being of the community".

Robespierre's penchant was towards the masses—the poor. His stubborn belief in the inherent goodness, sense of justice, righteousness of the common people seems extravagant, but it should be kept in mind that he was the leader in a class struggle, which was drawing towards a crisis. Such a leader must—as must the leader in a struggle between nations—forgo impartiality. He dare not measure too painstakingly, weigh and consider too delicately, lest he lose some of the conviction and self-assurance necessary for victory. Shibboleths such as: "My country, right or wrong!" or "The common people, right or wrong!" may not satisfy the finest thinking, but, as Wells has pointedly remarked: "Fine thinking, in the rough issues of life, is weak thinking". A rough approximation of truth, rather than truth itself, must satisfy the popular leader.

Robespierre did not claim that the people were always right. In his famous debate with Brissot he quoted Rousseau's: "The people always want the right, but do not always see it", and told his opponent that the best way to show one's respect for the people was not to flatter them, but to make them conscious of their shortcomings, while at the same time never ceasing to defend them. "Do you suppose that the applause of a few *sans-culottes* could make me lose my head to the extent that I would betray the cause of liberty and equality?" he wrote to Pétion, after the break between

them. "You accuse me of flattering the *canaille*, but you forget how much more profitable it is to flatter the rich and the so-called decent people."

Hê often rebuked misconduct on the part of the people, but usually refused to concede that it was the people themselves that had been guilty of the misconduct, and not "a few intriguants", "agents of the enemy" or royalists in disguise. If the accusation came from those whom he considered the people's enemies—the court, the nobility, the wealthy bourgeoisie—then he would throw the blame upon the accusers. The people would not have acted thus-and-so if they had not been abused or provoked. Take away the abuses or provocations and the people will do right. "Stop slandering the people and blaspheming against your Sovereign by constantly representing them as unworthy to enjoy their rights, as vicious, barbarous, corrupt!" he shouted on one occasion. "It is you who are both unjust and corrupt—you and the rich into whose hands you would transfer the power rightfully belonging to the people. The people are kind, patient, generous. They demand nothing but peace, justice, the right to live!"

When a proposal was made to give local authorities the right to declare martial law, he fought it stubbornly. "Two proposals for martial law during a single session? That's too much for a popular Assembly", he remarked sarcastically, and begged his colleagues not to put the fate of the country into the hands of military chiefs. "Don't allow yourselves to be persuaded by those who prefer peaceful slavery to liberty bought at the cost of a few sacrifices, and who never tire of pointing to a few castles in flames."

When d'Eprémesnil interrupted him, in his defence of the castle-burning peasants, with the remark: "Don't call such people citizens, call them brigands!" he

replied, with grim stubbornness: "I'll call them citizens accused of incendiarism".

His persistence was amazing. Others might grow weary, he would not. Others might become frightened of that monster, the people unleashed, he would not. Others might be bribed by money or social favours, he would not. He talked in season and out of season. He argued, pleaded, attacked, defended, indicted, incriminated, accused, complained, hinted, threatened. His high-pitched, penetrating voice rang through the hall on every occasion. Sometimes he irritated his colleagues. When the American, Paul Jones, came to congratulate the Assembly, and the chairman had appropriately replied, Robespierre insisted on making a reply of his own. He was told that it was superfluous, but that did not stop him. He appealed to the galleries in the name of free speech. The chairman yielded, and he had his say, without thereby adding to his oratorical laurels. The Abbé Maury moved sarcastically that his speech be printed.

When not speaking in the Assembly, he was lecturing at the Jacobin Club. In four years he made 500 speeches. Such a man is not easily laughed down. The process becomes too tedious, and there is danger of the scoffer himself becoming ridiculous. So, at last, the mockers subsided, the scoffers grew silent and uneasy, for the workmen in the gallery and in the crowded suburbs, the *forts* and the women of the Halles, the Jacobins in their Club—all had noticed this slight, greenish-pale, intense little man, on whom they could always rely to voice the extreme of their political aspirations, and who was never weary in their defence. The name given him by an artist, who exhibited a portrait of him, stuck: he became the "Incorruptible".

The press, too, noticed, and no longer misspelled

his name or neglected to print his speeches. Marat, in his cellar, noticed, and hailed him as the voice of the people in the Assembly. Camille Desmoulins noticed, and transferred his allegiance from Mirabeau back to his old school-fellow. The opposition press noticed, and started mentioning him almost as often as Mirabeau. *The Acts of the Apostles*, the chief royalist paper, printed his *Madrigal*, hailing him sarcastically as a poet. It gave a burlesqued account of the lightning rod case and remarked that he far surpassed Benjamin Franklin, being poet, historian, geographer, naturalist, physicist, journalist and legislator. "If the Count de Mirabeau is the Torch of Provence, then Monsieur de Robespierre is the Candle of Arras."

But applauded or ridiculed, he pursued his course with disconcerting directness and fixity of purpose.

VI

In the course of his legislative career he sponsored so extensive a programme of political reform, tending to democratize the State, that, after almost one hundred and fifty years, the most advanced democracies have not yet caught up with it, and, except for extending its benefits to women, have found but little to add to it. It included universal, direct manhood suffrage; the right to bear arms; free speech, the liberty of the press and an uncensored theatre; trial by jury; abolition of capital punishment; a compulsory public school system—with complete maintenance of the child by the State during the most formative period; the referendum, etc. He likewise favoured a far-reaching programme of social reform, that included such measures as the limitation of individual incomes and fortunes by a progressive income and inheritance tax; the recognition of the right

to work—comprising the establishment of public workshops and State aid for the unemployed; and State support for the aged and infirm.

The deputies of the Third Estate believed in liberty and equality. They said so on every occasion. But what they really meant was that they believed in liberty for their class—the middle class—and equality for that class with the nobles. When, however, it was a question of admitting the so-called lower classes to equality with themselves, it was quite another matter. Robespierre commented bitterly: "From the prosperous shopkeeper to the superb patrician, from the lawyer to the ancient duke or peer—nearly all wish to keep the privilege to despise humanity in the shape of the common people. They would rather submit to masters themselves than to see the number of their equals multiply. Provided they can oppress others, servitude seems a more desirable destiny to them than liberty shared with their fellow-citizens. They seem to imagine that God has, from all eternity, bent the backs of some to carry burdens and fashioned the shoulders of others to wear gold epaulets."

For him liberty meant all power in the hands of the people; and equality, equal rights for all French citizens—for Languillette in Arras and for the Jews of Metz. It was not that he loved Languillette or the Jews, but that he loved justice. It was an intellectual conviction with him. Moreover, he believed with Rousseau that political equality was a delusion unless it rested upon a basis of economic justice: "The unjust distribution of wealth is at the basis of political inequality and the destruction of liberty".

Unless the Revolution brought about a more equitable distribution of wealth, it would, in his opinion, have failed in its purpose: "A revolution which does

not have for its object the amelioration of the lot of the people, is a crime added to a previous crime. You have done nothing for the public good if all your laws, all your institutions do not tend to abolish this unjust distribution of wealth."

As a means of bringing about such better distribution he advocated a drastic inheritance law and a progressive income tax. As early as 1791, we find him saying: "Can a man dispose at will of the soil he has cultivated when he himself has turned to dust? No, a man's (landed) property must, after his death, be returned to the public domain."

As for other forms of property, the testator should be permitted to dispose of only a portion, the remainder falling to the State.

He laid down as a fundamental principle that "the rights of property can not be prejudicial to the security, liberty or property of others", which, says the socialist historian Jaurès, "lays the foundation for vast expropriations that the changes in the economic life of the nation might make necessary".

It will be asked whether he should be classed as a Socialist. The human aspiration at the back of Socialism and Communism is equality. That aspiration was also his. He rejected Collectivism as a means towards its realization, but this rejection is in line with Collectivist philosophy, which holds that an advanced stage of industrial development—a machine civilization—is necessary before it can be put to successful practice. There is, however, every reason to believe that he would have espoused Collectivism had it appeared practicable. Such was the opinion of the early Collectivists themselves. Babeuf, Buonarroti, Louis Blanc, Bronterre O'Brien—all, because of his aspiration, regard him as their forerunner. His significance, however, does not

lie in the fact that he had equalitarian ideas, since others in his day likewise had them and expressed them with greater lucidity. What constitutes his significance is that he was skilful enough to obtain power, and having done so, sincere enough to make an energetic attempt to translate his ideas into practice.

VII

The Suffrage Bill introduced in the Assembly divided the people of France into "active" and "passive" citizens. "Active" citizens were those paying a specified amount of taxes, and they alone were to be permitted to vote and be eligible to public office. Jews and actors were barred from all participation in government. The bill disfranchised about three million of the seven and a quarter million male French citizens of voting age. Robespierre exclaimed bitterly: "What a way to correct injustice, to add political ostracism to the lack of the advantages of fortune, and heap all power as well as wealth on the heads of a favoured few!" He demanded unrestricted, direct manhood suffrage, and political rights for both actors and Jews. The Abbé Maury took the lists against him and criticized the Jews for their ways of making a living, and the actors for their morals. Robespierre replied that the way the Jews were often compelled to make their living was the shame of their oppressors, and demanded to know if the morals of the clergy were above reproach.

His defence of the actors is interesting, because he has sometimes been accused of Pharisaism. He often spoke of virtue in his speeches, but took pains to explain that he meant civic virtue. "The soul of the Republic is virtue—that is to say, love of country, the magnanimous devotion which enables us to merge all

our private interests into the general interest." Though Puritanical in his habits, he does not seem to have been unduly concerned about the morals of others, unless they were of a nature to damage the public cause. His admiration for Rousseau extended to the *Confessions*, which certainly contains enough matter to shock the average Puritan. Although Danton's mode of life could not have been unknown to him, he did not abandon him until convinced that Danton was corrupt in his public as well as his private life. At the height of his power—in February, 1794—we find him saying: "We have no intention of shaping the Republic in the mould of Sparta. We wish it to possess neither monastic austerity nor monastic corruption."

Except in relation to actors, he was unable to get his views on suffrage adopted: and in spite of his vehement protests, "passive" citizens were barred from the National Guard and forbidden to bear arms. "Did you talk like that when they armed themselves in your defence—when, in fact, they made the Revolution?" he taunted his colleagues. Bitterly disillusioned, he wrote to his friend Buissart that he feared the net result of the constitution would be "an aristocracy of wealth rising on the ruins of the feudal aristocracy. I fail to see how the common people will be benefited thereby."

It cannot be without interest to listen to some of his argument against capital punishment:

"A grown man who kills a child he can disarm and punish is a monster. An accused person whom the law has condemned is neither more nor less than a vanquished and powerless enemy. He is more at your mercy than a child before a grown man. In the eyes of justice and mercy, therefore, these death sentences, got up with so much solemnity, are nothing more than base assassinations, solemn crimes committed not by in-

dividuals, but by the entire nation, and of which every citizen must bear the responsibility. The legislator who prefers death to milder punishments it is within his power to inflict, outrages every feeling and brutalizes the people's mind. Such a legislator resembles the cruel pedagogue who degrades and hardens the mind of his pupil by frequent use of chastisement. Listen to the voice of justice and reason! It tells us that human judgments are not sufficiently infallible to permit us to condemn a man to death. Of what use are sterile regrets, illusory reparations, which you accord to a vain shadow, to the insensible remains of your victim?"

War against nearly all Europe—and that most cruel of all wars, civil war—ultimately made him depart very far indeed from this humane doctrine.

There took place an historic passage at arms between him and Barnave concerning the ballot for the free mulattos of San Domingo. "Do you want colonies, yes or no?" Barnave shouted at him, and received the answer: "Perish the colonies if we must sacrifice to them our glory, our honour, our liberty of action!" The debate resulted in a great loss of popularity for Barnave, while the Lameths—who were among the largest property owners of San Domingo—condemned themselves by their silence. Fauchet, commenting on Robespierre's speech in his paper, *The Iron Mouth*, exclaimed: "How great he was by the side of these barterers of human flesh that spoke before and after him!"

Yet, when one analyses Robespierre's speech on this occasion, one will notice that his "Perish the colonies!" was pure rhetoric. In reality he did not wish the colonies to "perish". He wished it so little that he carefully abstained from demanding—as Brissot did in his newspaper—that slavery be abolished. All he asked was that it be not recognized constitutionally. This moderation

may seem surprising in a man usually represented as a theorist, but when one follows his career one will see that, with him, idealism went hand in hand with realism. For the National Assembly to have decreed the abolition of slavery would, at that time, have had the loss of the colonies for only practical result. We will see him frown upon idealism the moment it detaches itself from realism on many other occasions. When others will become enthusiastic about a republic at a time when the abolition of the monarchy seems to offer no practical advantage, he will oppose it. When others will wish to carry liberty to all the nations of Europe, he will tell them to be careful lest they lose it at home. When the French armies will be occupying Belgium and his colleagues in the Convention will wish to endow that country with the benefits of revolutionary legislation, he will remark that the best way to gain the sympathy of the Belgians is to let them manage their own affairs. When the French Ambassador to the United States—Genet—in his enthusiasm starts Jacobin activities in America, he will recall him for meddling in the internal affairs of a neutral. Even when advocating belief in a Supreme Being, he will give as one of his main reasons that it is socially useful. In fact, there are few examples of an idealist so entirely free from sentimentalism as Robespierre. That such a man should suddenly have turned into a fanatical terrorist either for the purpose of establishing an Utopia, or—as a recent biographer claims—of making men conform to his idea of virtue, is almost too absurd to merit discussion.

VIII

Le Chapelier introduced a law forbidding strikes and workmen's and employers' organizations. The measure

passed, and remained on the statute books for some seventy-five years, greatly handicapping the development of the French labour movement. Strange as it may seem, Robespierre did not raise his voice in opposition to the measure. Let us follow his thought.

Rousseau has said: "When private interests begin to make themselves felt and little combines begin to exert their influence upon the whole, then the common interest is vitiated and meets with opposition. Harmony ceases to exist, and the supreme will is no longer the will of all."

Rousseau believed that if there were no rich and no poor, social harmony would prevail, which, communicating itself to the government, would enable it to rule in the interest of all and without class bias—since classes would be virtually eliminated. "Little combines", formed to promote the interest of any particular group, without regard for the well-being of the whole of society, he wished to discourage.

There can be no doubt that this was at the bottom of Robespierre's silence. While he was still far removed from power, he yet expected the government to pass into the hands of the people at no distant date, and did not want it hampered by special interests—even special working-class interests. He expected to solve the labour problem by political means.

IX

In the autumn of 1790, Robespierre was notified by the City of Versailles that he had been elected Chief Magistrate of the District Tribunal. It was a great honour, and he accepted eagerly. In a letter written some time later to the local branch of "The Friends of the Constitution", he speaks of the relief it would

have been to him to retire to the peace of Versailles, where he could have devoted much of his time to his favourite occupation, writing. Perhaps he also dreamt of marriage with pretty Annette Duplessis, sister of the Lucile who a short time later married his friend Desmoulins, and to whom, at about that time, he is supposed to have been engaged. They all occasionally fondled dreams of retirement to a peaceful, uneventful existence, those young men of the Revolution. Thus Desmoulins, shortly after his marriage, speaks of abandoning the hectic career of revolutionary journalist, returning to the Bar, and devoting himself to being a good husband. Thus the stern, the terrible Saint-Just—relentless young god of revolutionary wrath—dreams of a rustic retreat with a beloved woman and books for company. Nothing ever came of it for any of them. They had to follow their destiny through noise and tumult to the guillotine; nor is it likely that they could have found happiness in retirement. The Revolution was their passion, their mistress; her hot embrace stirred their souls to their nethermost depths; not even on the scaffold could they have regretted having remained loyal to her.

Robespierre abandoned his dream some few months later, when elected Prosecutor of the City of Paris. In the above-mentioned letter he tries to justify his acceptance of the new honour. It is inconceivable that he could have done otherwise. He was a thread marked by fate for the weaving of its pattern of human destiny.

While other cities were thus honouring him, he was not nearly as popular in his home town of Arras. If *The Acts of the Apostles*, the royalist paper, is to be believed, violence was contemplated when word came that he meant to visit the city of his birth. If this be true, then a remarkable reversion of sentiment took

place within a short time, for the city gave him a royal welcome at the close of his term in the Assembly. Some feeling was, no doubt, engendered against him for a time by the machinations of his fellow deputy from Artois, de Beaumetz.

That worthy was, as we know, at the head of a clique that tried to make life as uncomfortable as possible for him. When the Suffrage Bill came up for discussion, Robespierre happened to remark, in the course of the debate, that the measure proposed would disfranchise the greater part of his constituents, as, owing to peculiar conditions in Artois, few people there paid direct taxes. De Beaumetz seized upon this to make it appear as if Robespierre had said that the people of Artois paid little or no taxes. He even had a pamphlet printed to that effect and had it distributed widely throughout the province. Robespierre—by now a very busy man—at first treated the matter lightly, relying upon his friends to contradict the falsehood. Not until Augustin had written him a couple of frantic letters did he finally pen a full and conclusive rejoinder, which was accompanied by a signed statement from the other deputies of his province, testifying to his exact language. De Beaumetz was not left a leg to stand on, and Charlotte was able to report to Robespierre, in the oddly high-flown language they used even in their intimate correspondence: "Calumny has been reduced to silence".

X

Camille Desmoulins, the most brilliant journalist of the Revolution, was going to be married, and Robespierre, his old and now famous college friend, was going to be one of the witnesses. It is indicative of the character of Desmoulins that of all the revolutionary

is one of the most touching love stories of that troubled era.

Lucile's father — a prosperous bourgeois — would not consent to the marriage until the young man was comparatively well established as the editor of a rather successful weekly, *The Revolutions of Paris and of Brabant*. It never reached the circulation of some of its competitors, for the general public could hardly appreciate the goblet of tart wine he placed before it; but he did well enough and was counted among the leading journalists. Frequently, however, he was in difficulties, for the mischievous sprite of a man could not help poking fun at friend and foe alike.

Towards one man, however, he was invariably respectful; that man was Robespierre. He usually spoke of him as "my dear Robespierre", or employed superlatives like "our Aristides", "our Demosthenes", "our Cato", or even "Virtue Incarnate", but through it all one senses that he stood a little in awe of him. Once he put a witticism in Robespierre's mouth of which the latter was quite innocent, and Robespierre called him to account rather sharply, addressing him in the letter as "*monsieur*" and demanding a retraction. Desmoulins felt hurt and wrote: "You are in the right, but you might at least greet an old comrade with a slight nod of the head. However, I love you anyway, for you are loyal to principles, if not to friendship." Part of the last sentence might well stand as Robespierre's epitaph.

Robespierre, however, was fond of Desmoulins, as far as his absorption with ideas permitted him to be fond of anybody. After Desmoulins' marriage, he occasionally visited at his house, and when a son was born to the young couple, the cold, austere man used to like to take the little fellow on his knee and play with him.

Poor Lucile tried to remind him of it on the eve of Camille's death and hers.

Now, Robespierre was one of the witnesses at the wedding, which took place in the church of St. Sulpice, on the pleasant square of that name. He was the most famous of those present, but there were others whose names were known throughout France. There was Pétion, who would succeed Bailly as Mayor of Paris; Brissot de Warville, then a well-known journalist and soon the leader of the Gironde; and others almost equally prominent. Mirabeau, who was to have been present, had been detained. The officiating priest was the Abbé Berardier, Principal of the College of Louis-le-Grand when Robespierre and Desmoulins had sat upon its benches, who still occupied that same office. Desmoulins was very fond of him, and it was at his request that the regular priest had consented to be present merely as a spectator. It is said that during the ceremony Desmoulins shed tears, and Robespierre is variously reported as having whispered to him: "Cry if you want to", or "Don't cry, hypocrite!" between which the reader may take his choice. We, who witness the peaceful scene and find ourselves in the position of intimates of fate, can hardly suppress a shudder, for ere four years will have passed, the bride and groom, their witnesses, the majority of their guests, will have mutually exterminated one another.

XI

Mirabeau was dying. Merciful was death in beckoning him while the proof of his betrayal was still safely locked in the iron cabinet at the Tuileries. On his death-bed he knew a nation to be watching with bated breath, and, actor that he was, he thoroughly enjoyed that

deathbed, saying as many things as he could think of that would be remembered.

He was one of the greatest orators of all time, loved luxury and fame, good food and drink, women and flowers. As for principles: "If you would succeed in life, kill your conscience", was the advice he gave a young man. According to Michelet, he did not quite succeed in killing his own, and "died from the hate of the people". Michelet should have added: and from the love of women.

Mirabeau's vivid personality has received considerably more attention from biographers than Robespierre's somewhat rigid figure. Yet, historically speaking, Robespierre appears by far the more important. The historian Lefebvre has justly remarked that Mirabeau's reputation as a statesman was saved by his timely death. He completely misread the force of the revolutionary impulse. Had he judged that impulse rightly, he would never have been a partisan of the veto—the most direct cause for the fall of the monarchy. In this, as well as in other matters, he proved himself a poor adviser to the King. Chateaubriand has said: "In the eyes of posterity Mirabeau will be remembered as essentially a champion of aristocracy, Robespierre, of democracy". Robespierre, like Mirabeau, wished at one time to preserve the monarchy, but he understood what Mirabeau failed to understand: that democracy alone could save it.

Mirabeau was exceedingly useful in the early stages of the Revolution. Later, he acted as an obstruction, the principal effect of which was to increase the force of the eventual outburst. Mirabeau's removal from the revolutionary stage changed nothing. He had lost all influence with the masses. He who at one time had been called affectionately "our little mother Mirabeau", a short

time before his death was shown the rope with which it was meant to hang him. Had he lived, he would have become an *émigré* or would have furnished another victim for the guillotine.

Robespierre, on the other hand, proved himself the keystone of the revolutionary arch. When he was removed, the Revolution collapsed. Had he remained, the internal economy of France would have undergone sweeping changes. World politics, too, would have been greatly affected, since he wished to make peace at the very first opportunity—a “peace without conquest”. It is bootless to discuss who was the greater man, or if either is entitled to be called great; but it is important to point out that at the time of his death Mirabeau had shot his bolt, while it was fear of the bolt yet to come that brought on the death of Robespierre. That is why Mirabeau’s death is devoid of historical importance, while Robespierre’s changed the course of history.

They clashed on almost every vital issue. Mirabeau, apparently, would carry off the victory, but his victories over the radical Left were never decisive. Robespierre addressed himself not to the deputies, who, he knew, would not heed him, but to the people in the gallery, to Paris, to France! Mirabeau defended the past, of which he wished to surrender relatively little; Robespierre attacked for the future, for which he claimed all. Mirabeau was eloquent; Robespierre, logical. Mirabeau was seldom sincere; Robespierre, nearly always. Once, when Robespierre was speaking, Mirabeau, who had listened attentively, bent his leonine head over to his neighbour and remarked:

|| “That man will go far; he believes all he says.”

|| He had laid his finger on one of the chief causes for Robespierre’s success.

The most dramatic passage at arms between them

took place not at the Assembly, but at the Jacobin Club. That evening, Mirabeau presided. Robespierre, who occupied the tribune, criticized the Suffrage Act and the measure barring "passive" citizens from the National Guard. Mirabeau called him to order, saying that the measures, having passed the Assembly, were no longer open for discussion. Robespierre persisted. Mirabeau—wishing to demonstrate to the younger man his pre-eminence at the Club as well as at the Assembly—stood up on his chair and roared: "All those who are with me, rally around me!"

To his disappointment and discomfiture only some thirty of those present heeded the summons. Noailles intervened, and Robespierre went on with his speech.

XII

It is claimed by some historians that, with the passing of Mirabeau, Robespierre gained fresh self-assurance. Not unlikely. Mirabeau far surpassed him as an orator, and he must, at times, have found this annoying. But whether it was due to the passing of Mirabeau, or merely to increasing self-confidence, born of the consciousness of his growing power outside the Assembly, it is a fact that soon after Mirabeau's death a new note was discernible in Robespierre's speeches: the note of authority. When a letter of criticism was received by the Assembly from a man of note, he, the leader of a small minority faction, rose to speak in the name of all his colleagues. On one occasion we find him saying, with a shade of arrogance: "These are the *instructions* I give to the Assembly". He seems to have felt increasingly that he was more than a minority leader, that he, rather than the majority, voiced the aspirations of the people of France.

He knew Charles Lameth to have become adviser to the court, and struck at him and others who might be tempted to abandon the popular cause by introducing a measure forbidding any deputy to accept ministerial or any other office in the gift of the Crown, for four years after the expiration of his mandate.

Later, he introduced a measure making members of the Constituent Assembly ineligible to the succeeding body. He defended his viewpoint in one of the most brilliant speeches of his career, greeted with thunderous applause from both sides of the House. That it should have met with considerable support is natural. Most of the deputies of the Right did not expect to be re-elected anyway, while those of the Left, if not in agreement with him, thought it expedient to appear to be, since such a gesture of disinterestedness could not help but appeal to their constituents. Robespierre was undoubtedly sincere when he argued that the nation would benefit by allowing a new set of men to gain experience under the eyes of trained predecessors, yet the measure was a mistake. It deprived the succeeding Assembly of competent leadership and was partly responsible for that body's blundering course.

It was the day following this triumph of Robespierre's oratory that Adrian Duport (who had resigned in protest as Chief Magistrate of the City of Paris when Robespierre was elected Prosecutor) delivered the swan song of the "Triumvirate" in its role of popular leadership. A bitter swan song it was, with disillusionment as the predominating note. He spoke of the short-sightedness of the multitude that pulls down one tyrant merely to raise another. That other, he said, might well prove the more dangerous if he managed to gain popular sanction for his tyranny. He warned against men who continually mouth principles, reiterate

glittering generalities, but guard themselves from assuming responsibility or descending from the clouds to a discussion of practical ways and means. And having shot these arrows in the direction of Robespierre, he promptly weakened their effect by twice repeating that the Revolution was over. Robespierre answered him without heat. He knew that what would soon be over was the "Triumvirate's" important role in the Revolution. His own was only beginning.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE KING'S FLIGHT

I

FROM the day of their arrival in Paris, the King of France and his family had been prisoners in the Tuileries. Not officially so, of course. There seemed, in fact, in the beginning, to be a revival of royalist sentiment among the Parisians as a result of the novelty of having the King in their midst. Crowds would form in front of the palace and call for the King to show himself, and when he would do so, looking benign and impressively obese, there would be cheering. Nevertheless, he was a hostage, meant to guarantee the nation against rebellious reaction at home and attack from abroad. The latter was especially feared. For, whatever their differences, the rulers of Europe had, it was thought, one preponderating common interest—to keep their subjects in servitude—and could not fail to realize that the Revolution, if not checked, might easily spread beyond the frontiers. Besides, the Emperor Leopold of Austria was a brother of Marie Antoinette, and there was also a constantly growing number of *émigrés* who were plotting and scheming. The people of Paris knew all this and felt safer with these royal hostages in their midst. They had entrusted their safe-keeping to Lafayette—elected Commander of the Paris National Guard—and feeling none too sure of him, would often come to see if perchance the cage were not empty.

In the spring and early summer of 1791, rumours

that the King meant to give Lafayette the slip grew more and more persistent. Marat, who received information from many underground sources, published an account of the contemplated flight that subsequently proved correct in most particulars. Warnings were not wanting. Bailly, the mayor, was warned by a woman of the court. Lafayette was warned. The Assembly was warned. The Jacobins were warned. Everybody was warned. The National Guard was stationed all about the palace. A sentry stood at the Queen's bedroom door. Yet, on the morning of June 21, 1791, Paris awoke to be told that the royal family was no longer at the Tuileries!

II

On the afternoon of that same day, Robespierre was at the apartment of his friend Pétion, in the Rue St. Honoré, close to the meeting-place of the Assembly. Pale, tragic-looking Brissot was there, and Manon Roland, a buxom woman of thirty-six, who had recently come from Lyon with her aged husband. Enthusiastic, spirited, ambitious, possessed of unusual vigour of mind and ability of expression, she later became the inspirational centre of the Gironde. Her little salon in the Rue Guénégaud was already a gathering place of the leaders of the radical Left. Pétion was seen there often, as was also Buzot, her future lover. Robespierre called occasionally, and was sufficiently intimate to drop in for dinner informally.

Pétion had brought his friends with him from the Assembly, which at half-past three had adjourned for one hour after having been in continuous session since nine o'clock that morning, when its president had called it to order and amidst tense silence had announced that the King . . . had been kidnapped by enemies of

the public weal! This pleasant fiction, designed to save the monarchy, was destined to be maintained through thick and thin, in spite of the fact that Louis had left a lengthy letter, addressed to the Assembly, in which he gave the reasons for his flight.

Outside, in the meantime, there had been much excitement. The suburbs had poured their tens of thousands into the heart of the city. The famous pikes (50,000 of which had been forged at the time of the taking of the Bastille) were much in evidence. Mobs were in front of the Tuileries, the City Hall and the Salle du Manège. Great nervousness prevailed. With the royal family out of harm's way, nothing, it was feared, would now deter the foreign rulers from invading France, aided, no doubt, from within by an uprising of the royalists.

Robespierre shared these alarmist views of the populace. Suspicious by nature, he saw a plot of vast proportions in which the court, the royalists, the bourgeoisie, the Assembly itself (with the exception of the handful of his followers)—all were involved. His suspicions were not altogether unfounded. While the Assembly would not have wished the King to seek asylum abroad, it would not have been at all displeased to see him set up court successfully at a safe distance from Paris, where it would have been able to follow him. The Assembly no longer liked Paris, and Paris no longer liked the Assembly—with the exception of Robespierre, Pétion and a score of their followers. The Assembly had not kept pace with the growth of radical sentiment in France, and especially in Paris—the “executive arm” of France. Loustallot—he who wrote the immortal phrase: “The great only seem great to us because we are on our knees: let us rise!”—said it was time to recall some of the deputies. Marat vowed that

he Assembly should be dissolved, and with usual amiability would soon be advising to split the deputies' tongues and impale the worthy men upon their seats! It is, therefore, hardly surprising that the Assembly was beginning to find Paris uncongenial and would have very much preferred to retire to some peaceful provincial city.

But where there existed only a secret wish and unorganized sentiment, Robespierre saw active complicity and treason. Could the King, he argued, have escaped without the connivance of Bailly and Lafayette? And did that silly fiction about the kidnapping not prove the guilt of the Assembly? He could see nothing ahead but a contemplated St. Bartholomew's night of patriots, and paced the floor, arguing the matter with his friends.

He did not get much encouragement. Plethoric, easy-going Pétion refused to get excited. As far as he could see, this was an excellent opportunity to get rid of the monarchy altogether and establish a republic. Brissot opined that Lafayette had probably connived at the flight to make a republic possible. Wasn't he a republican at heart? Robespierre shrugged his shoulders. He knew Brissot's weakness for Lafayette, whom he himself regarded as wholly unreliable—a muddle-headed notoriety seeker—an opinion in which Napoleon later was to concur. Madame Roland tells us that he snickered, chewed his nails and said: "What is a republic?" The snicker was probably a derisive little laugh, for he had little faith in a "bourgeois" republic with Lafayette at the head.

III

The centre of attraction that night was the Jacobin Club. The hall was packed. As the various leaders

appeared, they were cheered. Danton was there. Let us contemplate him for a moment. He is of Herculean built, with the shoulders of an Atlas. His bulldog countenance is heavily jowled and ravaged by small-pox. His gimlet eyes are almost hidden by the puffy fulness of his cheeks. His hair is dark and shaggy, his nose short and thick, his lips full and sensuous. When he speaks he makes violent, sweeping gestures. His voice is deep, resonant and seems to be capable of unlimited expansion. He could make the windows rattle—ay, the very building vibrate—were he to turn himself loose. Although capable of great flights of eloquence, his language is frequently coarse. Barère—while not an unprejudiced witness—says that the Halles might have envied his mode of expression at popular gatherings.

French historians differ about Danton. Some regard him as the greatest figure of the Revolution; others, as the most sinister. The battle between the Dantonists and the Robespierrists is not yet over, but the latter may be said to be gaining ground rapidly. The Robespierrists accuse Danton of having been in the pay of the court; of bearing a heavy responsibility for the September massacres; of having been dishonest in the administration of public funds; of having conspired with Dumouriez; of having been guilty of looting in Belgium; of trying to obtain several millions from the Spanish ambassador and the British Foreign Office with which to save the King; of having been in the pay of the British Foreign Office as *agent provocateur*!

The author has read practically all the evidence and has arrived at the following conclusion: The first charge may be said to be definitely proved, although the nature of the services rendered by Danton is in doubt. Some, like Aulard, claim that he gave nothing in return



DANTON

From the portrait at the Carnavalet

for the money he received; others, like Michelet, that he was paid as Italian *bravi* were paid—to shield the King from attacks by his followers; still others, like Mathiez, are inclined to think that he acted as *agent provocateur* for the court before doing so for the British Foreign Office. It is impossible to acquit Danton of partial responsibility for the massacres; as for the remaining charges, while much of the evidence is damaging, none is conclusive, and his activity on various occasions seems to contradict the charge that he was an *agent provocateur*.

There was to come a time when Robespierre would become convinced of the truth of most of the above charges. At this time, however, he and Danton were still the best of friends. As Robespierre now climbed into the tribune, he was received with thunderous applause. Then followed tense silence. Everybody realized the gravity of the occasion. All eyes were upon him, all ears straining to listen. In the women's gallery sat Madame Roland. On a bench in front, leaning eagerly forward, sat the emotional Desmoulins.

Although now an experienced orator and parliamentarian, Robespierre was obviously nervous. It was not the King's flight that mattered, he told them. The saving of forty million a year—the cost of keeping up the court—was the least of the blessings that might have resulted from the flight, but . . . And now he unfolded before them the lurid panorama his imagination had conjured up—the vast conspiracy aimed at stopping the Revolution and at the destruction of all thus far accomplished that did not meet with the approval of the bourgeoisie. He knew, he said, that the sweeping accusation he was making—involving practically every man in power and most of his colleagues—spelled his doom, but he would welcome death, since it would

spare him the agony of witnessing the calamities about to overtake his country.

It was a little theatrical, but proved tremendously effective. Desmoulins, sitting with fists clenched and lips tightly compressed, gazing at the speaker as if hypnotized, could contain himself no longer, but sprang to his feet and shouted: "We'll all die with you!" The next moment the whole audience was on its feet. Some drew swords, all stretched out an arm towards the speaker and shouted in unison: "We'll all die with you!" and then: "Liberty or death!" Madame-Roland, in her memoirs, comments on the impressiveness of the scene.

He had hardly finished when there was a commotion at the door, and in came Lafayette, resplendent in general's uniform, arm in arm with Alexander Lameth. They were followed by Barnave, with his self-assured air of young duellist lawyer, by Le Chapelier, Sieyès—all the conservative Left that held membership in the Jacobin Club—some two hundred strong. They had hoped by this invasion *en masse* to stampede the Club into support of their policy. They were too late. Robespierre had tucked the Jacobins safely into his pocket with his emotional appeal

IV

Alas for the royal hegira! If any of a hundred or more accidents, delays, misunderstandings, coincidences, mistakes, oversights had not happened; any of a hundred or more minute circumstances had been different, the royal family might have escaped. But fate would not have it so. The King was recognized, pursued, stopped at Varennes—a short distance from his goal—led back to Paris.

Having come perilously near losing their king, the Constitutionals (as the conservative Left was now called) had thereby been shocked into the conviction that he was indispensable to them. They had been largely instrumental in stripping royalty of its power and dignity; they now covered it with ridicule by taking such measures to insure against another hegira as impinged upon ordinary decency (a National Guard was stationed in the Queen's bedroom overnight!); but this did not deter them from turning militantly royalist.

Now, whence this sudden efflorescence of royalist sentiment among the Constitutionals? Let us listen to Barnave, who had taken the place of Mirabeau as principal spokesman of the Third Estate:

"The Revolution", solemnly warned Barnave, "cannot take another step without grave peril. If in the direction of liberty the next step is to be the abolition of the monarchy, then in the direction of equality the next step may well prove to be an attack on the institution of private property itself. Every one should, therefore, realize that it is to our common interest that the Revolution cease."

The flight, however, had had exactly the opposite effect upon various other groups of people, who, on their part, had become convinced that the time had come to dispense with royalty altogether. Some of these were intellectuals, who had been republicans for some time and now became militantly so; others, however, had hitherto no more thought it possible for a nation to do without a king than for a human body to function minus its head. Among the first was Condorcet, in whose salon republicanism had been discussed for some time; Thomas Paine, Honorary Citizen of France, and now sojourning there; Brissot, Bonneville, Desmoulins, and a number of others. Among the second

were the Cordeliers and many of the workmen of the faubourgs.

To save the monarchy, the Constitutionals held fast to the fiction that the King had been kidnapped, and proposed that all those connected with the flight should be arrested and dealt with by the courts. The King and Queen—the supposed victims of the kidnapping and, moreover, inviolable—would merely be asked to make a statement to a committee appointed for that purpose.

Now, Robespierre was none too enthusiastic about the republican movement himself. He considered it premature. If a republic were established, it would be so, he thought, in name only. In reality it would be a dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, with Lafayette at the head. This he considered more inimical to the progress of democracy and social reform than the balancing of power between the court and the bourgeoisie, with the Fourth Estate as the arbiter. The word "republic" did not dazzle him as it did many of his radical contemporaries. He believed with Rousseau that a republic can be aristocratic and a monarchy democratic. Venice was a republic, yet far from being a democracy. Even the American Republic did not satisfy him. "Who would", he said, "exchange the sublime destinies of the people of France for the constitution of the United States, which, being based upon the aristocracy of wealth, is already tending towards despotism?" And he pointedly asked: "Is it in the terms monarchy and republic that the solution of the great social problems is to be found?"

All this is clear enough, but in the days immediately following the King's return he was not so explicit. He appears, in fact, to have been purposely vague. From the standpoint of political strategy this was probably the best course he could have followed. Republi-

can ideas had made such strides within his own ranks that to have openly combated them would have led to serious dissension. Moreover, such a course would have placed him in the awkward position of having to align himself with Barnave and the Lameths. Since, furthermore, he expected the republican fever to burn itself out as quickly as it had started, he decided to take no definite stand. At the Jacobin Club he delivered himself of a statement that can serve as a classical example of equivocation:

"I have been accused", he said, "of being a republican. That is doing me too much honour: I am not. Had I been accused of being a royalist, that would have been a reflection upon me, for I am not that either. The words republic and monarchy are meaningless in themselves. The word republic does not necessarily mean any particular form of government, but the government of a free people."

This makes clear only the fact that it was not intended to be clear.

In the Assembly he did some skilful fencing. Although he and Barnave virtually agreed on the main issue, he yet managed to speak on the popular side, while Barnave lost during the debate what popularity was left him. After throwing a sop to the populace by demanding a plebiscite (which he knew perfectly well would not be granted) he let loose his forensic thunder on side issues—the inviolability of the King and the proposal that those who aided in the flight be punished. If underlings, he said, were to suffer while the principals went scot-free, then he would consider it an honour to act as their counsel. Ay, he would defend the King's principal tool in the flight—de Bouillé himself! Having brought down the galleries with this statement, he aligned himself skilfully with Barnave by proposing

that—in the absence of a referendum—the entire matter be dropped.

V

Republican sentiment in Paris had, however, grown apace, and when, on the 16th of July, the Assembly voted to maintain the King in office, the populace closed the theatres in sign of mourning. That evening the Jacobin Club was packed. No sooner had the session opened than a member accused another of having made a derogatory remark about Robespierre. By this time, to say anything against him at the Jacobin Club was equivalent to a sin against the Holy Ghost. The audience was thrown into an uproar. The accused vowed that he had been misunderstood. Little good did it do him. The tumult waxed greater. Threats were shouted. Violence was feared. The chairman put on his hat, which magic rite usually sufficed to allay any kind of disorder. This time it did not have the desired effect. Just then the great man himself appeared and imprecations changed to cheers. Informed of what had happened, he held up his hand for silence. Then he remarked that the man had a perfect right to say what he pleased about him. Lustier cheers. The incident was closed, having merely served to add to the idol's already shining lustre.

It is comparatively easy to refrain from resenting what a thousand or so people have already resented on one's behalf; yet, there are other indications that, for a time, Robespierre made an effort to show himself forbearing—an effort in which, eventually, he was to fail lamentably. When Brissot and Guadet had made a vicious attack upon him, he said:

"I don't mind being accused. I consider the right of denunciation as the people's safeguard, and I hereby

formally pledge myself never to appeal to any tribunal save that of public opinion."

In his speech on the liberty of the press he made a similar statement, saying that he would never seek legal redress for anything written against him, were it even an incitement to do him bodily injury.

He had thus far managed to keep the Jacobins skilfully in leash on the republican issue. This evening, however, the hall was invaded by followers of the Duke of Orleans, who clamoured for the dethronement of the King—obviously from Orleanist rather than republican sentiment. A number of speeches were made advocating the drawing up of a petition to be placed the following day on the "Altar of the Fatherland", on the Champ-de-Mars, there to be signed by all and sundry. The "altar" was a huge wooden structure, a hundred feet high, erected the previous year for the great national festival held to commemorate the storming of the Bastille. It consisted of a broad, majestic flight of stairs, ascending to a platform on which stood an altar-shaped fixture.

Robespierre opposed the proposal but mildly. He either did not think the situation warranted throwing his popularity into the scale, or—what is more probable—decided that oblique strategy was likely to produce better results. Anyway, the following day, shortly after the petition had made its appearance upon the "altar", La Rivière arrived, accompanied by several other Jacobins, and said he had orders to withdraw the petition, which he thereupon proceeded to do. Cordelier leaders present did not relish this and promptly got up one of their own, couched in more fiery language. But the Jacobins had relinquished all responsibility.

La Rivière explains that after a conference with Robespierre he had gone to the Jacobin hall, where

other leaders were assembled, and convinced them that the petition should be withdrawn. From his recital it would appear that the initiative came from him, but there is every reason to believe that Robespierre was the instigator of the move.

Before the day was over, the Jacobins were to have good reason to thank their leader. All afternoon, Charles Lameth, President of the Assembly, kept sending impatient notes to the City Hall, demanding that martial law be proclaimed and the crowd on the Champ-de-Mars dispersed. Bailly, the Mayor, finally yielded, reluctantly. At half-past five in the evening the red flag of martial law appeared at a window of the City Hall, and towards eight the crowd on the Champ-de-Mars saw to its astonishment columns of soldiers converging upon it from all directions.

Viewed from the great stairway, as from a grandstand, it was an imposing spectacle. Regiment after regiment of blue-coated National Guards, bayonets fixed, and flashing in the oblique rays of the evening sun, marching to the roll of drums; dragoons on spirited horses; cannon. Lafayette was conspicuous in blue and gold, mounted on his white charger, and so was Bailly, on foot, wearing his tricolour sash of office and holding a rolled paper in his hand. Behind the Mayor, a soldier was carrying the red flag of martial law.

The soldiers halted, completely surrounding the great quadrangular space, and Bailly unrolled and read the proclamation. It was greeted with hoots and groans. A few stones went flying. Then the crack of a pistol shot: a dragoon was wounded in the leg. And then the Guards raised their rifles and fired—not on the unruly crowd below, but on the people massed upon the great stairway!

A gasp of horror and amazement. Then shrieks,

cries, shouts, yells, the cursing of men, the wailing of women, the weeping of children. The multitude descended like a cascade, stumbling, falling over the prostrate. The people fled in all directions, yet knew not where to flee, all exits having been blocked. And then the dragoons suddenly gave their horses the spurs, swords flashed in air—they charged the panic-stricken people.

But Lafayette relented. When his cannoneers were about to pour shrapnel into the crowd, he spurred his horse in front of the cannon, held up his hand with imperious gesture. The heroes of the day were that regiment of National Guards which, seeing the terror-stricken people fleeing towards it, opened its ranks, let the fugitives pass, closed them again, and presenting a grim barrier of bayonets to the charging dragoons, compelled them to rein in.

Robespierre's enemies have charged him with poltroonery in connection with the Champ-de-Mars massacre and the attack on the Tuileries the following year. On both occasions, they assure us, he went into hiding. In neither case is the charge supported by evidence. On the day of the massacre he merely remained at home all day, and in the evening went to the Jacobin Club. Since he was opposed to the petition, it is difficult to see why he should have gone to the Champ-de-Mars. There is nothing in Robespierre's career to justify the accusation of poltroonery. Aulard is undoubtedly right when he says that it is difficult to imagine him resorting to fisticuffs or leading a battle charge, but at no time does he appear to have given way to fear. Louvet, before he became his enemy, said of him that he was "always calm in the face of danger". Although feeling certain that a violent death awaited him, he resolutely pursued his dangerous course. His enemies would have

been but too willing to compromise: he gave and asked no quarter. Malouet has said of Louis XVI that he possessed "passive courage". In the case of Louis, the term is descriptive of both his physical and moral courage. It may be applied to Robespierre's physical courage alone. His moral courage was not only very great, but exceptionally aggressive. In fact, he fell a victim to its aggressiveness.

VI

That evening, Robespierre left his lodgings in the Rue de Saintonge and went to the Jacobin Club. News of the massacre had already reached him. He felt pained, worried, indignant. Perhaps he blamed himself a little for not having been sufficiently resolute in combating a move which, considering the strength and temper of the opposition, had been foolhardy and premature. One had to use judgment, guile even, he must have thought, or one would be crushed.

The hall was packed. He was greeted with cheers. He spoke briefly, counselling self-control, and then sat down to listen to the accounts of eye-witnesses. Suddenly there was a commotion at the door, and a number of National Guards in uniform forced their way in, brandishing weapons, shouting threats and curses. Resolute men put them out. The doors were locked. But the atmosphere remained tense. Every now and then Guards returning from the Champ-de-Mars, who had celebrated their dubious victory at taverns along the way, would pound on the door with the butts of their rifles, threatening to bring up cannon and make short work of the Jacobins. Finally, quiet prevailed outside, and those present started to leave.

There was in the hall a tall, grey-eyed, alert-looking

man of about fifty-five—a certain Maurice Duplay. He was a cabinetmaker by trade (not a workman, but an employer) and had amassed a snug little fortune, invested in building property, which in ordinary times yielded him an income of some 15,000 francs. He had once retired from business, but times being hard and most of his property standing empty, had been forced to start up his shop again, and employed several workmen. Although by social status a bourgeois, he was a staunch Jacobin and a great admirer of the "Incorruptible". He now made his way to Robespierre, whom he already knew, and begged him not to return home, where he ran the risk of being arrested, but to be his overnight guest.

The danger was real enough. During the succeeding days, the victorious reaction started a drive upon the radicals. Marat's presses were smashed, and such of the republican leaders as had not fled the city taken into custody. Madame Roland tells us that fearing for Robespierre's safety, she went that night to the Rue de Saintonge to offer him hospitality, but did not find him in. Duplay's house offered a safe refuge, and as others present urged Robespierre to accept, he consented, and left the hall in the company of the cabinet-maker.

As they went down the street, he was recognized and cheered. One man is reported to have cried: "If we must have a king, why not have him?" Duplay lived in the Rue St. Honoré, a short distance from the Club, and they soon halted before a *porte-cochère*, in which Duplay opened a panel door. They went through a tunnel-like passage, crossed a court, and entered the dining-room on the ground floor. Here, Duplay, beaming with satisfaction at having so honoured a guest, presented Robespierre to his wife—a motherly-

looking woman, whose pleasure at seeing him there seemed no less genuine than her husband's. He was ushered into the adjoining parlour, furnished with red plush, mahogany furniture, and the remainder of the household was called to be introduced.

Duplay had four daughters—one of them married and away from home—and a son, a boy of thirteen. The eldest of the three girls who entered the room and were presented to Robespierre was Eleonore. She was twenty-two, and judging by her portrait at the Carnavalet, could not lay claim to great beauty. She must, however, have possessed qualities that appealed to Robespierre, for she later became his betrothed (gossips said, his mistress, but there is nothing to substantiate this). In her quiet way she must have loved him, for although her father later remade his fortune and could have given her a substantial dowry, she never married. For more than twenty years she cherished his manuscripts, finally burning them on the advice of friends, who feared the revenge of the Bourbons if she were found in possession of them. A medallion with his effigy, moulded by Collet, she kept until her death, in 1832. She is said to have been in the crowd to catch a last glimpse of him when he was led to the guillotine.

To what extent he loved her, we do not know. Her sister, Madame Lebas, throws no light on the relationship in her memoirs. If notes or letters ever passed between them, they have been lost. Robespierre's sister, Charlotte, denies the existence of an engagement and says that he suggested marriage with Eleonore to his brother Augustin. Charlotte's testimony, however, is suspect because of her jealous dislike for the Duplays. Yet one may safely take it for granted that theirs was not (especially on his part) the sort of love of which legends are made. The ardour of his soul was reserved



ELEONORE DUPLAY

From the pastel portrait at the Carnavalet

for a more impersonal ideal—one his fixed devotion to which makes him appear both less and more egotistic than his fellow mortals.

The second daughter, Victoria, was self-effacing and played no part in his life. The youngest, Elisabeth, we know best, thanks to her memoirs, in which she reveals herself spirited, affectionate, courageous, loyal. On the evening that he first met her, she was sixteen. Her intimates called her Babet—a pet name he, too, soon was to be using for her. We get glimpses of him throughout the memoirs, in which she speaks of him as a young sister might speak of a much-loved elder brother. He was, she says, invariably kind, and used to intercede for her with her parents when she was being scolded.

Still another member of the household was a nephew, Simon Duplay, a youth of about seventeen. He became Robespierre's secretary, but when war broke out, enlisted, lost a leg at Valmy, then returned to Paris and resumed his secretarial duties. Some light is thrown upon his character by the fact that when he reached man's estate he became a police spy. He, who as a youth had been secretary to a great revolutionist, specialized in hounding revolutionists and ferreting out conspiracies against the reign of a despot.

But now they were all assembled in the parlour, and a little embarrassed in the presence of this famous man. Refreshments were served, and then Madame Duplay departed with one of the girls to get Robespierre's room ready. A short time later, Duplay ushered him into it. It was located on the first floor and was modest enough. The low ceiling sloped garretwise. The furnishings consisted of a wooden bedstead with white-flowered, dimity curtains, made of an old dress of Madame Duplay; a small desk by the window, which

gave out upon the court with its cart-shed and lean-to; a mirror over the chimney-piece, and three rush-bottomed chairs. Adjoining the room was a dressing-cabinet. Later, a bookstand was to be added for Robespierre's books, for this room, which he had intended to occupy for one night only, was destined (except for a short interval) to remain his dwelling-place until his death.

The Duplay house stood at what is now No. 398 Rue St. Honoré. The part fronting the street has been completely rebuilt. There are differences of opinion regarding that giving upon the court. The preponderance of evidence seems to indicate that, except for having been surmounted by several stories, it has remained virtually unchanged.

VII

When on the evening of the 16th of July the Jacobins resolved to draw up a petition for the unseating of the King, some 200 Constitutionalist deputies, members of the Club, withdrew in a body and went across the street to a stately building, once a Feuillant monastery. Here they held a meeting and decided to send out a letter to the 400 affiliated branches, explaining their stand and notifying them that the headquarters of the Jacobins were temporarily transferred to the Feuillants. Later, they meant to reorganize the Club—that is, to weed out what they considered undesirable elements. But they made the mistake of leaving their opponents in possession of the building and records. The following day, to be sure, they made a demand for the turning over of both, but when this was refused, resigned themselves confidently to the hope of capturing the provincial branches by correspondence.

Robespierre had been opposed to the petition as

much as they, but it would never have occurred to him to leave the Club on that account. Did a leader worthy of the name desert the people when it was most in need of his guidance? He remained. Only five of his colleagues in the Assembly followed his example, all other deputies who had been members resigned, considering the Club hopelessly compromised in spite of La Rivière's last-minute action.

The fact that he was deserted by nearly all his followers in the Assembly, and felt that the fate of the Revolution hung in the balance, was undoubtedly the reason why Robespierre did not raise his voice in protest against the massacre. He listened to the Mayor's report, heard Charles Lameth congratulate Bailly on his firmness, compressed his lips and said nothing.

The Jacobins, now fully convinced of the soundness of his leadership, placed themselves unreservedly in his hands. He wrote, on their behalf, a letter to the Assembly that was more politic than sincere. "We must show ourselves astute in dealing with our opponents", he said on a later occasion, and this, evidently, was one of the times when he thought it advisable to be astute.

What probably more than the letter saved the Jacobins at that time was the confidence of the Feuillants (as the dissenting Jacobins were now called) of capturing the provincial Clubs. They were sadly disappointed. Of the 400 affiliated branches only four joined their ranks.

The Jacobins now decided to do a little house cleaning of their own. They elected a committee of twelve to scrutinize the record of every member, recommend expulsions and exercise a like vigilance over all new applicants. The committee appointed a sub-committee, consisting of Robespierre and Pétion, to do the actual work, and Pétion being easy-going and

somewhat slothful, it was not long before the entire inquisitorial burden had devolved upon Robespierre. His power at the Club became, as a result, almost dictatorial.

Now, it so happened that a sale of Church lands had just taken place, some 800,000,000 francs' worth of Church property passing into private hands. The new owners being anxious to insure their holdings by membership in a society that opposed a return to the old régime, the number of Jacobin Clubs swelled within the next two months to almost a thousand. Thus, in September of that same year—only a few months after the Club's very existence had been threatened—Robespierre found himself more influential than ever, the recognized head of a great political army whose influence reached into every corner of the kingdom.

In the Assembly, however, the battle was going against him. A committee had been appointed to codify the laws that had been passed into a constitution. Fearing that unless some of the measures received conservative revision Louis would refuse to sign, the Constitutionals introduced a number of amendments, one of which called for still further restriction of the suffrage. Conscious of his growing power outside, Robespierre, for once, flung caution to the wind and shouted from the tribune: "If a constitution, twice postponed, can still be emasculated and amended, what course is there open to us except to resume our chains or to pick up our arms?"

It was a threat of rebellion, of civil war, directed not merely against the King and his ministers, but against the Assembly itself—the bourgeoisie in power! There was a moment's consternation, then, from the Constitutionalist benches, rushed Duport, beside himself with

rage, and confronting Robespierre, shook his fist and hurled insults at him. Robespierre knew that the Assembly once adjourned, the "Triumvirate" and its stillborn club at the Feuillants would soon sink into oblivion, while he, the leader of the Jacobins, would continue to play an increasingly important role. He shrugged his shoulders contemptuously, and lifting his eyes towards the chairman, remarked quietly: "Mr. President, I'll thank you for telling Monsieur Duport not to be insulting if he wishes to remain near me".

The chairman clanged his bell, and Duport resumed his seat. Then Robespierre launched into the most vitriolic attack the Assembly had thus far heard. He used his favourite method, innuendo. Looking fixedly now at Duport, now at Barnave, now at Charles or Alexander Lameth—his former friends—he said with biting sarcasm that he felt sure there was no member of the Assembly *cowardly* enough to conspire with the court concerning any part of the constitution; *treacherous* enough to suggest to that court any amendment that shame alone had kept him from proposing himself; *arrogant* enough to dare use the Revolution for his own private ends. He went on in this fashion, enumerating the things he claimed he felt certain no member of the Assembly could possibly have been guilty of, and which every one present knew, or suspected, the "Triumvirate" to have upon its conscience. The radicals howled their delight, the galleries went wild, the nobles and clergy nudged each other, and having no further use for the Constitutionals, who, they realized, would soon be out of power, finally rocked with laughter and joined in the applause. It was a Roman holiday. All this while Duport, Barnave and the Lameths sat livid with rage, yet at a loss how to reply. Almost every historian who describes the scene remarks that a Mirabeau would

somewhat slothful, it was not long before the entire inquisitorial burden had devolved upon Robespierre. His power at the Club became, as a result, almost dictatorial.

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not have received these poisoned arrows without emitting a savage roar and striking back at the attacker. But Barnave was, after all, not a Mirabeau. He thought of the intimate conversation he had had with the Queen, when he had accompanied the royal family back to Paris after its flight, of his intention to be still further useful to her, bit his lip and said nothing.

Finally the day arrived when Louis XVI was to appear before the Assembly and solemnly swear fealty to the new code. The Constitutionalists—contradictory as always in their attitude towards the Crown—decided that while taking the oath the King should stand bare-headed, while the deputies should remain seated and covered. When Malouet, the royalist leader, objected to the puerility of this procedure, one of the radical deputies remarked that Monsieur Malouet should be permitted to listen to the King on his knees, if he felt like it. Before we condemn the Assembly too severely, it is well to remember that not so many years before it was precisely that position the commoners were forced to assume when listening to the King. Louis managed to go through the humiliating ceremony without incident, but back at the palace burst into tears of hurt pride.

The honours of that day were for Robespierre and Pétion. As the deputies filed out after adjournment, the immense crowd gathered outside stood, necks craned, watching for the appearance of the two radical leaders. They came out together, and had no sooner been sighted, than a deafening cheer went up. Handkerchiefs waved, hats were flung in air. A Committee stepped forward, and in the name of the people of Paris presented each with a laurel wreath. The two friends responded with a few words of thanks, and, to escape from over-enthusiastic admirers, climbed into a hack-

ney. In the twinkling of an eye, the horses were unhitched and the crowd started to pull the carriage along in triumph. Robespierre jumped out almost angry, and addressing the crowd, said it was unworthy of freemen to turn themselves into draft horses in order to show their appreciation. Pétion had followed, and an eye-witness relates that as the two men stood side by side, it was noted that Pétion was all smiles and affably acknowledged the cheers, while Robespierre frowned and seemed distraught.

Yet, if it was glory he craved, he had ample reason for satisfaction. He had not nearly reached the apogee of his popularity and was only at the beginning of his power, yet already was the idol of the Paris populace. The court, the nobility and the rich feared him as they feared no other man. His engraved portrait could be seen in the window of every bookshop, and hung in the place of honour in thousands of homes, especially—and that was not the least of his glory—in those of the poor. At the Théâtre Molière, night after night, capacity crowds thunderously applauded his replica upon the stage, as he confounded the Prince de Condé and the Cardinal de Rohan. But he was a man with a vision, and as he looked upon that crowd, the realization of that vision seemed very remote.

A short time later, he decided to pay a visit to Arras. He was received with affectionate pride by Charlotte, Augustin and his faithful Buissart, with acclaim by the populace, and with poorly disguised ill-will by the authorities. The people went far up the road to meet the carriage in which he came from Bapaume—a small town fifteen miles from Arras, where a guard of honour had been awaiting him. Again the horses were unhitched, and again, with that uncompromising way of his, he got out to stop the demonstration. Since new enthusiasts

PART II

CHAPTER SIX

WAR

I

COULD France, in spite of the Revolution, have remained at peace with her neighbours? Most historians agree that but for the court and the Girondins, peace might have been maintained. Robespierre throws the blame principally upon the Girondins. The German historian Goetz-Bernstein—who has made a special study of the foreign policy of the Girondins—agrees with him, and, like him, holds the Gironde leader Brissot principally responsible.

Brissot de Warville and Robespierre were old acquaintances. The former, who was five years older, had been senior clerk in the office of the Procurator of Parliament Nolleau when Robespierre had been junior clerk. In his memoirs, Brissot claims that he taught Robespierre all the latter knew of law, in connection with which it is pertinent to remark that Brissot held his diploma from the College of Law at Rheims, admittedly the worst in the kingdom, where diplomas were practically sold, and where he had gone to escape serious study.

The trumpeting part of his name Brissot acquired by Anglicizing Ouarville—a hamlet where the family owned some property—to the resounding Warville. His father was a hotel-keeper at Chartres. His mother,

fanatically religious, had finally lost her reason. But if his mother's religious fanaticism predisposed Brissot for his political mysticism, definite shape was given the latter by the teachings of Anacharsis Cloots.

Cloots was a Prussian baron, reared in France. He was a well-meaning but hair-brained Utopian, whose antics during the Revolution were as picturesque as they were extravagant. He conceived the grandiose scheme of a World Republic, with Paris for capital. The method proposed by him to realize this political Utopia was "armed propaganda"—a sort of holy crusade against all the tyrants of the earth, in which their own subjects would be invited to participate on the side of the self-appointed liberators. He considered two years as the approximate time necessary to carry out this programme.

Brissot did not go as far as Cloots. He was satisfied with a League of Nations, which would have been well enough had he—a man in power—not adopted Cloots' method of "armed propaganda". Napoleon, in his memoirs, likewise informs us that it had been his intention to form a League of Nations, under the hegemony of France; but while he was willing to let every nation keep whatever form of government it had at that time, Brissot had the more ambitious scheme of revolutionizing every country in Europe.

It should not be thought that this ideology formed the sole basis of his disastrous foreign policy. He was, in fact, a curious mixture of impractical visionary and cunning materialist. He hoped, by means of a successful war, to raise the value of the assignats at home and abroad and thus solve the economic crisis. Being an ardent republican, he likewise hoped (as he plainly intimated in the course of his debate with Robespierre) that the war would bring to the surface the perfidy of

the court in a manner which would make the establishment of a republic inevitable. If his later activities tend to contradict this, it is due to the fact that his dominating impulse was a thirst for power and glory, which made him an opportunist. In the shadow of the guillotine he murmured: "I've loved glory overmuch". His thirst for glory made him vibrate ecstatically to Cloots' heroic vision. We find him writing with apparent sincerity to Dumouriez, during the latter's campaign in Belgium: "What is Richelieu, what is Alberoni, what are their much-vaunted projects compared with the World Revolution it has been given to us to unleash?"

How the wily Dumouriez—who was figuring how to turn his country over to the monarchists with profit to himself—must have smiled at this schoolboyish sentiment of the man who was then directing the destinies of France!

II

Robespierre was not a member of the Legislative Assembly. His own motion had made him, as well as every other member of the Constituent, ineligible. The new Assembly was—as might have been expected—more radical than its predecessor. Those who during the elections had had the support of what once had been the conservative Left (the Constitutionals and Feuillants) were now the Right. The Left, led by Brissot—who was a member of the Jacobin Club and editor of *The French Patriot*—was headed by the deputies of the Gironde. They, with a few others, soon were able to dominate the Assembly by their enthusiasm and glowing oratory.

Revolutions are made by the young. In every revolution, whatever tyranny is, or is not abolished, the

tyranny of the aged must go. The Girondins were young men. They were captivated by Brissot's foreign policy, partly, no doubt, because it was in favour with the bourgeoisie, in whose salons they were welcomed (as soon as war was declared, stocks soared); but mainly because it appealed to their imagination and ambition. War furnished a theme for their oratory that made the themes of the orators of the Constituent appear pale and insipid by comparison. "They were", says Louis Blanc, "artists strayed into politics." The vision they and Brissot saw—and painted in their speeches for all the world to behold—would, if put upon canvas, have shown a martial host of exalted men, led by a symbolical female figure with a sword. Fleeing before them in terror are emperors, kings, nobles, and their henchmen; flying joyously towards them—to welcome them as liberators, embrace them and crown them with flowers—are peasants and their children. This is what they saw, what they painted, what they actually expected!

For them the Assembly was a magnificent stage—their newly acquired mistresses, France, the world, their audience. They were anxious to perform, to become fixed, new stars in the oratorical heavens. They performed heroically. Thanks to their heroic performance, their ambition, their ardour, their oratory, the Revolution was to blaze up in an apotheosis of martial glory and . . . die!

III

Robespierre returned to Paris on November 28, 1791. He brought with him a dog—a Great Dane, Brout. He had to assume his duties as Public Prosecutor, to which office he had been elected while still a deputy. But it was the war hysteria that had seized upon Paris during his absence that principally preoccupied

him. Indeed, he soon resigned the office, so he might devote all his time to combating the war fever. The royalist Montjoie gives him credit for having conducted himself with fairness and impartiality during his short tenure.

It is not surprising that Brissot's warlike foreign policy should have alarmed Robespierre. It has been pointed out that he was far from being the visionary doctrinaire he has so often been painted. Brissot's idea of setting out to liberate the world while France was yet far from having consolidated its own freedom seemed to him criminal folly. It was—as he expressed it—like rushing to put out a fire in a neighbour's house while one's own was still burning. He considered an armed crusade for liberty quixotic in any event, but the proposal to undertake it under the leadership of the King and his ministers—who, being the executive power, would have the direction of the armies—simply appalled him. He must have been very anxious to get in touch with the situation, for long and fatiguing as was the journey by post-chaise from Arras, he yet appeared at the Jacobin Club the evening of the day of his arrival.

When he entered, the meeting was already in progress, but proceedings halted, while the audience rose to its feet and cheered him. When the noise had subsided, Collot d'Herbois, who presided, called for a motion to have "the former member of the Constituent Assembly, justly called the 'Incorruptible'", take his place in the chair. It was put, and carried unanimously. Robespierre took the chair amidst renewed applause, and having thanked the audience for the cordiality of the reception, called for the order of business.

It should, incidentally, be remarked that the soubriquet the "Incorruptible", by which he was frequently

referred to, seemed to embarrass rather than to flatter him. Once, during a speech at the Club, he said with obvious annoyance that it was a pretty state of affairs when a man was considered deserving of a high-sounding appellation simply for not having betrayed the people.

The report of the Assembly's Committee of Foreign Affairs was under discussion, and the speeches reflected the intensity and extent of the war fever. They must have somewhat bewildered Robespierre, or perhaps have made him decide that it would be a tactical blunder to appear intransigent. Anyway, his short speech from the chair that evening made it appear as if he and Brissot were not far apart.

Brissot's chief pretext for war was the *émigrés*, some 5000 of whom had been permitted by the Elector of Trèves to organize themselves into an irregular army in the city of Coblenz. Other small German border states were likewise not observing strict neutrality. It appears, however, that no great European power had the least intention of intervening in France. Austria had trouble with Turkey and in Belgium. Russia and Prussia were occupied with Poland. Pitt had given Gustavus of Sweden plainly to understand that England would not interfere in the affairs of its neighbour. Now—as Marat had aptly remarked—if the *émigrés* could expect no help from any of the great powers (which Brissot admitted to be the case), why bother about them at all? Nevertheless, Robespierre yielded that evening sufficiently to the current to observe that the Austrian Emperor—who as protector of the border states was responsible for their conduct—should be notified that unless the *émigrés* were dispersed, France would be compelled to take up arms. Whatever was responsible for this momentary lapse, he quickly col-

lected himself and took his stand.

It should be emphasized that he stood practically alone. Only two important newspapers—Marat's *The People's Friend* and Prudhomme's *The Revolutions of Paris*—had not come out enthusiastically for war, and even these were undecided. Two days after Robespierre's return, Marat spoke out plainly against war, but a fortnight later he gave up his paper and went to England. Danton kept silent. Desmoulins was carried away by Vergniaud's and Isnard's resounding war oratory. Condorcet did not keep his philosophical balance and joined the war party, contributing the famous slogan: "War to the palace, peace to the cottage!" Madame Roland was one of Brissot's ablest supporters. The Jacobin Club was a hotbed of war propaganda.

In justice to Brissot, Condorcet and others it should be said that glancing over the intellectual map of the Europe of that time, one might easily have been deceived into thinking that an armed crusade for liberty stood a fair chance of success. The intellectuals of Europe had caught fire at the flame lighted in France. Even when that flame revealed the sinister shadows of the massacres and the Terror, some would still refuse to be disillusioned. We find a Fichte writing: "This blood is not blood; this death is not death! Whatever France or the Revolution may do, it is well!" But a Fichte, a Klopstock and their intellectual compeers were not Germany. A Priestley and a Wilberforce were not England. A Pestalozzi was not Switzerland. The illiterate masses either knew nothing of the Revolution, or knew only what was false or distorted. It is a statesman's business not to allow himself to be deceived by appearances. Brissot, Vergniaud, Condorcet, Pétion were deceived, Robespierre was not. If others were not,

they kept silent. He did not hesitate to risk his immense popularity by going contrary to a wellnigh unanimous public opinion on an issue that excited popular passion in the extreme. He must, therefore, be given credit for exceptional moral courage, and one can hardly agree with the historian Aulard when he says that Robespierre "followed public opinion rather than directed it".

IV

For about two weeks after his return, Robespierre contented himself with interjecting pointed remarks into discussions at the Club. He seems to have been waiting for Brissot to come and state his position. He did not have long to wait. On the 16th of December, Brissot appeared. He was a little man, smaller than Robespierre, and as pale and angular. He dressed *en polisson*, wearing boots instead of shoes and leaving his long, dark hair unpowdered. His clothing was shabby, in marked contrast with Maximilien's. It is characteristic of Brissot that while he constantly rubbed elbows with financiers and dabbled in a variety of affairs (some of them of doubtful honesty), he seldom had any money. He and Robespierre shook hands cordially enough, then Brissot climbed into the tribune and launched into an explanation of his foreign policy.

It is impossible to read Brissot's speeches without being struck by their amazing inconsistency. One moment he tries to prove that the *émigrés* can expect no help from the great powers, the next he declares that the latter have united to crush France. One moment he says that all he wants is a punitive expedition into the border states, the next he talks as if he meant to start a European conflagration. That nothing less is his purpose is obvious from an article from his pen in *The*



BRISSOT

From a contemporary etching

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French Patriot the day preceding his appearance at the Club, in which he exclaims with lyric abandon:

"War! War! Such is the cry of all good patriots. Such is the wish of all the friends of liberty scattered over the face of Europe and awaiting only war's auspicious intervention to overthrow their oppressors. It is the war expiatory that will renew the face of the earth and plant the standard of liberty upon the palaces of kings, the harems of sultans, the castles of the little feudal tyrants, the temples of popes and muftis. It is to this holy crusade that Anacharsis Cloots invited the Assembly in the name of all mankind."

There can, therefore, exist no doubt that Brissot was a full-fledged disciple of the prophet Anacharsis.

In his speech, Brissot attributed all the difficulties that beset France to a single cause—Coblentz, the German city where the Count of Artois held court, and which was the principal gathering-place of the *émigrés*. The refractory and reactionary elements of France would, he vowed, persist in their treasonable conduct as long as that wicked city—from which they expected momentary relief—was allowed to exist; while the patriots would remain unhappy, discouraged and dissatisfied because they were worried about Coblentz! "Do you wish, with a single blow, to destroy aristocrats, malcontents, refractory elements? Destroy Coblentz! With Coblentz destroyed, everything will be peaceful within as well as without."

Lest this astonishing picture of a nation of twenty-five million people worrying itself ill about a handful of *émigrés* might not be entirely convincing to Robespierre, whom he was eyeing uneasily, he added an argument that was even more astonishing:

"A people that has reconquered its liberty after two hundred years of slavery, needs war to consolidate it.

It needs it, so it might be put to the test. It needs it, so it might have the opportunity to demonstrate that it is worthy of it. It needs it, so it might purge itself of despotism. It needs it, so it might cast from its bosom those still in a position to corrupt it."

What is the meaning of this metaphysical declaration? It means that Brissot wished to create a situation which would give the King an opportunity to betray, so that a republic might be established. Lest there be any doubt about this, it should be stated that in the second speech he delivered in the course of this historical debate, he made himself quite clear by saying: "*We have need of great treason*". The unhappy man never stopped to consider what betrayal on the part of the court might mean to the country in time of war—the trap into which it might lead the French armies; the disaster that might result; the price to be paid in blood and suffering; not to mention the possible sacrifice of all the Revolution had thus far accomplished.

v

It was the 18th of December 1791, and a festive occasion at the Club. A delegation from England was going to be officially received, and the hall was decorated with French, English and American flags. There was much speech-making and more than the ordinary enthusiasm. A young girl presented the visitors with a flower-decked ark containing the constitution. Brissot and Cloots were both present. The latter had had, no doubt, a hand in staging the ceremony, which was after that delightful but rash Utopian's own heart. At the height of the enthusiasm a man stepped forward and deposited in front of the chairman a Damascus blade, to be presented to the first general inflicting a defeat

upon the enemy, as soon as war had been declared. The chairman happened to be Isnard, whose speeches suggest nothing so much as the hollow rumbling of stage thunder. He was equal to the occasion. Raising the sword high above his head, he cried: "Here it is! Here it is! The people of France will utter a mighty shout and it will be echoed by all the nations of the world. The earth will cover itself with warriors, and the enemies of liberty will be obliterated from the Family of Men!"

While the thunderous applause that greeted this rodomontade was still in progress, it was noted that Robespierre had risen and waited frowning for the noise to subside. The cheers, clapping and stamping died, and all eyes turned in his direction.

"We are", he said severely, "about to discuss a matter of great importance—the war. I ask the meeting to refrain from demonstrations such as this at a time when dispassionate discussion and cool, balanced judgment are of prime importance."

He sat down. Isnard, annoyed at the obvious rebuke to the chair, recognized Roederer, who revived the enthusiasm with a ringing pro-war oration, in which, like Brissot, he claimed that the evil lay in Coblenz and that it was time to stamp it out. When he had finished, there was a renewed outburst of cheering and hand-clapping, during which Robespierre caught the chairman's eye and obtained the floor. When he appeared in the tribune, the noise stopped suddenly, and he began his first historic speech against a war that was to last twenty-two years, involve nearly every country in Europe, and cost five million lives.

"Is the evil in Coblenz?" he queried. "I thought it was here, in Paris, around the throne, upon the throne itself." Would it not be wiser to vanquish the foe

within before considering a war against enemies without?

He told the Jacobins that by clamouring for war they were playing directly into the hands of the court, and showed them why. Where others had painted the glories of war, he painted its horrors—the blood, the tears, the suffering, the waste of public funds, the corruption. And all for what? For liberty? No! War made for despotism. At the end of the trail, he said prophetically, they would find a Caesar or a Cromwell.

Brissot's sophistry did not deceive him. He quoted from the article in his paper and pointed out the contradictions in his speech. If the *émigrés* could expect no help from the great powers, then it was doing them altogether too much honour to make all this to-do about them. As for starting a world crusade, he did not believe that the French armies would be received as liberators. He saw no signs of any serious awakening among the peoples of Europe. "It is by the spread of ideas and by demonstrating to the world that the Revolution has brought us happiness that you will extend its domain, not by force of arms and by the horrors of war."

He ridiculed the idea of undertaking a war for liberty under the auspices of the court and its minions. "If the sceptres of Europe are ever broken, it will not be by such hands", he told them. He warned them of possible defeat, pointing out the disorganization of the army and navy, from which hundreds of royalist officers had deserted. In the Constituent Assembly he had been alone in advocating the complete reorganization of the military and naval forces. He now repeated the demand, saying that the country should be put in a state of defence, and the people armed, if only with pikes.

Turning towards Brissot, who, by inference, had

taken him to task for his distrustful attitude, he declared:

"You have stated that distrust is a fearful state of mind. Distrust is to liberty what jealousy is to love. Better be distrustful than foolishly over-confident. The greatness of a people's representative does not consist in the ability to flatter a public opinion momentarily excited by governmental machinations. Sometimes it consists of struggling—even if with nothing but one's conscience to aid it—against a torrent of prejudice and factional intrigue. I have little hope that my words will carry sufficient weight to turn the tide, and it is my ardent wish that the future may prove me wrong, but if it does not, then I shall at least have the satisfaction of knowing that I have not contributed towards the ruin of my country".

So great was the impression produced by the speech that the Jacobins—only a little while before frantically clamouring for war—voted to have it printed and sent to all affiliated branches.

Brissot got up and announced that he would answer him at an early session.

VI

Robespierre's anti-war speeches (he made four of prime importance) are among his best. As models of oratory they are not without defects. Sometimes he dwells too long on a given point and thereby weakens the effect. At other times he repeats himself. But his logic never wavers, and he leaves his opponents not an inch of ground to stand on. A number of times he waxes truly eloquent. It was in the course of one of these speeches that, according to Desmoulins, half the audience was in tears. Their effect was prodigious. Practically single-handed, Robespierre started a power-

ful anti-war current. The requirements of just proportion will allow only very limited quotation.

Addressing himself to Brissot—who was present, and took notes with the intention of replying, as he had done, if not very effectively, to Robespierre's first speech—he drew the following ironical picture of the crusade the Gironde was so anxious to set on foot:

"You will undertake the conquest of Germany first. Then you will lead our army on a triumphal march through all the neighbouring states. Wherever you go, you will establish representative government—Municipal Councils, Provincial and National Assemblies. Our generals, by your orders, will only be missionaries; our army camps, schools of political economy. The minions of the foreign rulers will come flying towards you, not to repulse you, but to listen to your speeches!

"It is regrettable that truth and common sense confound this splendid vision. The most extravagant idea that can enter the mind of a public man is that it is sufficient to invade—sword in hand—a foreign country to have its people become enamoured of one's laws and constitution. Nobody loves armed missionaries. Instinct and prudence alike command that they be treated as enemies."

Profound insight into the way revolutions have their origin is shown in the following passage:

"In nations constituted as are nearly all the nations of Europe, there are three powers: the monarch, the aristocracy, the people. The last is powerless. Under such circumstances a revolution can break out only as the result of a gradual process. It starts with the nobles, the clergy, the rich, whom the people support against the dominant power—the monarch—because their interests coincide with their own. So it was in our country. It was the judiciary, the nobles, the clergy, the rich

who gave the original impulse to the Revolution. The people appeared on the scene only later. Those who gave the first impulse have since repented, or at least they would have liked to stop the Revolution when they saw that power was likely to pass into the hands of the people. But it was they who started it. Without their initiative the nation would be still under the yoke of despotism. This historical truth should teach you to what extent you can rely on the sympathy of the nations of Europe. Far from giving the signal to revolt, the aristocracy of those nations, forewarned by events in France, has leagued itself with the monarch to keep the people in ignorance and bondage."

How easy it is, he told Brissot, to acquit oneself of one's obligations towards the people by giving it a war! Have we no enemies at home? Why do you wish to distract the people's attention from internal problems and lead it into this trap?

He outlined immediately necessary reforms and warned Brissot that it was the duty of a people's representative to enlighten the people, not to fan its passion and prejudice. "The best way to show one's respect for the people is not by vaunting its liberty and power, and thus lulling it to sleep, but by making it conscious of its shortcomings, while at the same time never ceasing to raise one's voice in its defence." Were it to be admitted that the people of its own accord desired war, then it would still be the duty of the people's representative to disabuse it, and to point out the true road to freedom. If a capricious patient were to refuse a healing potion and say, "No, I want to get well by taking this poison", would a good physician hand it to him? "To try to bring liberty to others before having won it for oneself is to perpetuate slavery both for oneself and the rest of mankind."

He paid his respects to Anacharsis Cloots—"that effervescent philanthropist", as he called him—in the following terms:

"I believe it was the Greek Anacharsis who poked fun at the expense of an astronomer so occupied with contemplating the heavens that he fell into a ditch he failed to notice upon the earth. Our modern Anacharsis is so busy watching for the angel of liberty to descend from the skies to lead our legions to the destruction of all the tyrants of the universe, that he quite fails to notice the abyss into which this is likely to plunge us."

Jaurès once charged that Robespierre's critics do not appear to have read his speeches. It is difficult to believe that Taine has failed to read them, yet even more difficult to understand how, having done so, he could have arrived at so low an estimate of their worth.

VII

As time progressed and the foreign situation became more and more complicated, the oratorical duel between Robespierre and Brissot waxed increasingly bitter. Some of their mutual friends tried to patch up a peace. One evening, at the Club, an old scholar, by the name of Dusaulx, eulogized both and appealed to them to become reconciled in the interest of the country. This easy solution found favour with the audience. Stimulated by the applause, both rose and embraced, Gallic fashion. But no sooner had the acclaim subsided, than Robespierre made his reservations. He felt no animus against Brissot personally, he said, but his conception of public duty would not permit him to allow himself to be turned aside from the course he had chosen.

The reconciliation had but little effect on their growing personal animosity. The time was not far

distant when, referring to Brissot, Robespierre would say: "No one has ever accused me of having exercised a dishonourable calling, or having sullied my name by disgraceful associations or scandalous court procedure", and when Brissot would write: "There are three opinions current about Robespierre: one is that he is a lunatic; another, that his conduct is inspired by injured pride; still another, that he is in the pay of the court". It was, in fact, becoming a common accusation against him, in the Gironde press, that he was an agent of Austria.

Robespierre was at a marked disadvantage during the quarrel. He stood virtually alone; Brissot had many able lieutenants. He could make himself heard only at the Jacobin and Cordelier Clubs; Brissot could do the same, but could likewise speak in the Assembly. The publication and distribution of Robespierre's speeches had to be paid for by private subscription; those of Brissot and his lieutenants circulated at public expense, since they were members of the Assembly. Robespierre had only lately started publishing a small weekly periodical; Brissot had a long-established newspaper of wide circulation and the support of numerous other organs of publicity. This last he largely obtained through the use of public money, from a special fund at the disposal of the Minister of the Interior—Roland—who was his friend and owed his appointment to him. Besides, Brissot made lavish use of patronage. Fréron has said that all that was needed to get a government job was to make a good speech against Robespierre at the Jacobin Club. Few, indeed, were the expedients to which Brissot would not resort in order to gain his end. Dumont tells us in his memoirs: "I even heard him propose to dress up French soldiers as Austrian uhlans and have them attack some French villages".

As the war fever mounted higher, those who had gathered around Robespierre began to waver, fearing to compromise themselves. Danton who had given him faint-hearted support, said to Legendre: "If he wants to ruin himself, let him; there is no reason why we should follow his example". This was reported to Robespierre, and he never forgave it. He mentions it in the notes he handed to Saint-Just when the latter was writing his accusatory report against the Dantonists. Prudhomme, whose important newspaper—*The Revolutions of Paris*—had given him able assistance, likewise deserted him. There is some evidence that he was won over by monetary considerations, and from what we know of Prudhomme this is not surprising. Desmoulins published a withering pamphlet against Brissot, but it concerned a private quarrel he had with the latter. At the Club the important Committee of Correspondence was controlled by the Girondins. Considering the forces aligned against him, it is, indeed, surprising, and proof of his immense prestige, that he was not discredited. Try as they might, Brissot and his friends could not silence him and could not keep the public from paying respectful attention to him. Guadet, somewhat naïvely, appealed to him to eliminate himself from the position of "people's idol", which, he admitted, Robespierre continued to occupy.

VIII

Proyart has said—and Robespierre himself confirms it—that Maximilien ceased being a good Catholic while still in college. This, however, did not hinder him from remaining intensely religious. His religious faith—like his political and economic doctrine—can be traced to Rousseau. Rousseau gives us an insight into

his religious convictions in that part of *Émile* known as *The Confessions of the Savoyard Vicar*.

His conception of the Deity is almost pantheistic: "I perceive God everywhere in his works. I feel him in myself. I see him all about me. But the moment I wish to contemplate him as a separate entity, the moment I wish to discover where or what he is, he escapes me."

This all-pervading spirit, called God, loves justice and order. He has not created evil; man has made it: "Man, seek no longer for the author of evil, that author is thyself".

Conscience—which he denies to be custom, as claimed by Montaigne—is an infallible compass, and man's will is free: "To ask God to change my will is to ask him to do the work and let me draw the pay".

The apparent triumph of evil is, in itself, proof of immortality: "If I possessed no other proof of the soul's immortality than the triumph of evil upon earth and the wrong suffered by the just, these alone would suffice. So shocking a dissonance in the universal harmony would oblige me to seek a solution. I would say to myself: All is not over when life is ended. Accounts are settled after death."

He is somewhat vague about the form the settlement will take: "I do not say that the virtuous man will be rewarded—for what better reward can be his than continuous existence in accordance with his nature?—but I know that he will be happy. What care I for the evil-doer? His lot does not interest me. Nevertheless, I am loath to believe that he will be condemned to eternal torment."

Virtue, he tells us, finds, moreover, its earthly reward in the self-contentment which is the portion of

the just, while vice is punished by the opposite feeling in the heart of the unrighteous.

Divine revelation through the Bible, or any other book, has little place in his system: "I have never believed that God, on pain of eternal torment, required me to possess knowledge. I, therefore, closed all the books. There is one book accessible to all: it is the Book of Nature. It is in this great and sublime work that I have learned to serve and adore its Divine Author."

Nevertheless, he says of the Gospels: "The Gospels bear such an imprint of truth, they are so striking, so utterly inimitable, that were one to consider them as having been invented, the inventor would be greater than He with whom they deal". So, while not altogether accepting the divinity of Christ, he admits that "his life and death are those of a God".

Such, in brief, is the faith Rousseau preached and Robespierre accepted. Its chief characteristic was a lack of definiteness, which allowed a great deal of room for spiritual adventuring. Its cardinal articles of faith were belief in the existence of a Supreme Being and the immortality of the Soul.

Robespierre and the Girondins clashed on this, as they did on almost everything else. While some of the Girondins were Deists, others—following the upper-class fashion of the day—were atheists. But those whom Robespierre called "the people"—the workmen, artisans, peasants, small shopkeepers—had little time for fashion. They lacked the education necessary to indulge in philosophical speculations regarding the existence of the Deity. Many of them saw in the Church an ally of their oppressors, and the Church's rigid dogma likewise harmonized ill with the new ideas of liberty they had acquired; but it would be a misconception of the popular mind to believe that (except in the case of a

small minority) it could have travelled all the way to atheism. Atheism—as Robespierre expressed it—was essentially aristocratic, and it was fitting that the Girondins, who came to represent the new aristocracy of wealth, should, many of them, have been atheists, and that he, who was the champion of the masses, should have believed fervently in a God who sided with liberty against tyranny, with the weak against the strong, with the poor against the rich.

IX

Largely as a result of the Gironde's foreign policy, relations between France and Austria became increasingly strained. Then the Emperor of Austria—Leopold—died suddenly, and Robespierre, commenting on this at the Club, remarked that by removing Leopold, Providence had intervened in the interest of France far more effectively than had the wisdom of French statesmen. The Girondin Guadet, who succeeded him in the tribune, did more than question this somewhat unphilosophical claim to the partisanship of the Deity, when he said with great heat:

“I’ve heard the word Providence pronounced several times during the last address. I believe it has been said that Providence saved us in spite of ourselves. I confess that I can see no sense to such language. I never would have thought that a man who for three years has so courageously laboured to deliver the people from the slavery of despotism would now lend his aid to place it under the yoke of superstition.”

Robespierre replied promptly:

“Superstition is, in truth, one of the pillars of despotism, but pronouncing the name of the Deity is hardly teaching people to be superstitious. I abhor as much as

any man all the impious sects that further ambition, passion and fanaticism in the name of the Creator. Far be it from me, however, to confound that Creator with the ridiculous scarecrow that serves the ends of despotism. What I proclaim is the truth of the eternal verities so necessary to human frailty in its upward struggle towards virtue. This is no more idle talk on my part than it has been on the part of the many illustrious men who, I assure you, did not find belief in God an obstacle to the attainment of virtue."

But the Jacobins were by no means unanimous on this subject. Many were materialists. Interruptions arose from all parts of the hall. A voice cried: "No cant!" But he would not be silenced.

"No, you will not stifle my voice", he went on with unwonted passion. "To invoke Providence—to say that the Creator interests himself in the destinies of nations—to say that he watches with especial care over the destinies of the French Revolution, is no idle language! It is a sentiment that wells from the bottom of my heart, a sentiment that is indispensable to me and has sustained me in the Constituent Assembly when I was the victim of passion and prejudice and surrounded by enemies. How could I, alone with my soul, have kept up the superhuman struggle had I not lifted that soul aloft to God? Ah, that Divine aid has been worth to me all the advantages gained by those who preferred to betray the people!"

It was said in the heat of debate, to an audience the majority of which appears to have been out of sympathy with him. There can be no doubt of his entire sincerity. Undaunted by the hostile demonstration, he demanded that the Jacobins go on record whether or not they agreed with him. Then the tumult waxed so great that the chairman put on his hat and adjourned

the meeting. The issue he had raised remained dormant for some time, but he had taken a stand that was to prove very unpopular with the vanguard of the Revolution.

X

Barère has called the Girondins "the big children of the Revolution". They were political Bohemians, charming and colourful, but hardly fitted to guide the nation through one of its greatest crises. The temperamental difference between them and Robespierre is especially illustrated by their respective attitudes towards the red cap, which at about this time transformed the streets of Paris into lanes of moving poppies.

The origin of the red cap is uncertain. Some claim it to have been the ordinary headgear of the French peasant, others, that of galley slaves. The Girondins seized upon it as children upon a toy. Brissot championed it in his paper "because it covers the head without concealing it; because it heightens natural grace and beauty; because it lends itself to all sorts of embellishment". Robespierre—austere and serious, with an almost Puritanical aversion for outward display—frowned upon it. "Some people would rather wear a hundred red caps than do a single good action", he grumbled. It is claimed that his prestige in Paris was so great that, for a while at least, the red cap disappeared as if by magic from the Paris streets after he had pronounced against it.

One day, Dumouriez—the new Minister of Foreign Affairs—came to attend a meeting of the Jacobins. He was a stocky little man of fifty, brimful of vitality. His appearance at the Club was an event. Never before had a cabinet minister honoured the Jacobins with his presence. And what an event it was when he appeared

in the tribune, a red cap upon his head! When he had finished, Robespierre obtained the floor. As he passed down the aisle towards the tribune, very erect and dignified, a man stepped up to him and pulled a red cap over his powdered hair. It might have been a follower of Brissot or an over-enthusiastic admirer, who did not wish him to appear at a disadvantage after Dumouriez. Whoever it was, Robespierre would not allow himself to be made a pawn. He stopped, pulled off the cap and threw it on the floor. It was an action requiring courage, for the cap was already a symbol, and few would have cared to risk the consequences of such a gesture.

XI

The diplomatic notes between France and Austria became more and more belligerent; the forces hurrying the nation towards war, irresistible. And one day, when Condorcet was speaking in the Assembly, unfolding a plan for popular education such as no nation had hitherto dared to contemplate, he was interrupted by the entrance of Louis XVI, accompanied by all his ministers. And thus, symbolically, civilization once more left the stage to make room for Mars—Louis, in a trembling voice, declared war on the King of Hungary and Bohemia.

One can easily imagine Robespierre sitting in his lamplit room that night meditating upon the future, while the noise of the red-capped crowds, cheering and singing the *Ça Ira*, penetrated to him. What could have been his thoughts? Did he foresee the stupendous proportions the conflict would take? Prussia, Sardinia, England, Holland, Spain, Russia—all drawn into the vortex—a quarter of a century of almost uninterrupted warfare—five million corpses, three million of them

French? At the end of the trail they would find a Caesar or a Cromwell he had told them. Did he foresee that he himself would be the Cromwell, but not, as he had so ardently hoped, to lead France to freedom, only to prepare the way for Caesar?

And the cheering crowds outside, what did they see? They saw, no doubt, the vision of the Gironde, the vision of Cloots—an heroic France, marching, sword in hand, to bring liberty and enlightenment to the nations of the world. Alas for human intentions! Six years later, on the 27th of July, 1798—on an anniversary of Robespierre's fall—many of those who marched through the streets of Paris that night singing the *Ça Ira*, and saw the heroic vision, were to witness a splendid pageant wend its way through those same streets. There was to be float after float laden with rare and valuable books, manuscripts, medallions, paintings and statuary plundered by the French republican legions from the libraries, museums, public buildings and squares of the nations of Europe—the Laocoön, the Apollo of the Belvedere, the Venus of the Capitol, Titians, Raphaels, Veroneses. Float after float!—ten wagon-loads of manuscripts and books, thirty wagon-loads of paintings and statuary—the most civilizing possessions nations have—stolen by the armies that were to bring liberty and enlightenment, and paraded before the Paris populace to the chant of the *Carmen Saeculare* of Horace, set to music by Philidor, and accompanied by an honour guard of the professors of the College of France and the Polytechnic Institute, and the conservators of the Paris libraries and museums.

Such was to be the outcome of the dream of Cloots—the altruistic world conquest of Brissot and the Gironde.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE FALL OF THE MONARCHY

I

ONE day, in January 1792, the Duplay household was thrown into great excitement, for there had come to call upon Robespierre a man who to some was a legendary figure whose existence they doubted; to others, an object of horror and loathing; to still others, a fierce but inspired prophet of the Revolution—Marat!

Marat had just returned from England, where he had gone two weeks after Robespierre's return from Arras. Strange as it may seem, the two men, although engaged in a common cause, had until that time never met, and according to the testimony of both, no communication of any kind had ever passed between them. One must consider, however, that Marat kept mostly in hiding, and that Robespierre, while recognizing his sincerity, greatly disapproved of his tactics.

Marat was an ill-shaped dwarf, less than five feet tall, bow-legged, with broad chest and shoulders, short thick neck, and a bony, tortured countenance. His forehead was low, broad and receding; his shaggy, dark-brown hair, touched with grey; his nose, broad and aquiline; his mouth, wide and thin-lipped; his eyes, deep-set and grey, with amber glints; his complexion, a livid sallow. The ferocity of his appearance was enhanced by a handkerchief he usually knotted about his head, and the general neglect and untidiness of his clothing. A piratical touch was given by a brace of

pistols he often wore in his belt. During his frequent sojourns in cellars he had contracted a violent eczema and was constantly scratching. Danton, who knew him well, claims that he had a volcanic temper and was quarrelsome and unsociable.

Two men more unlike than Robespierre and Marat would be difficult to imagine; yet, politically speaking, Robespierre had more in common with him than with any other front-rank leader of the Revolution. Marat, from the beginning, saw, like him, something more in the Revolution than a mere transfer of power from the nobility to the bourgeoisie. He realized the need of radical social reform, and his sympathies were, like Robespierre's, not with the bourgeoisie, but with the common people—the proletariat. It may even be said that his perception of the impending struggle between the growing city proletariat and the employing class was clearer than Robespierre's; but he neglected the peasantry, and his language was so violent as to arouse the passions rather than the intellect. "When a man lacks everything he has the right to take what others have in superfluity. Rather than starve, he is justified in cutting another's throat and devouring the palpitating flesh" . . . is no isolated example of his ferocious manner of writing.

Long before war with virtually all the rest of Europe and armed rebellion in more than half of France brought the guillotine into play, Marat was calling for heads and ever more heads. Starting with a modest 500, he at one time decided that 500,000 might have to fall before the Revolution could succeed. He justified this proposed slaughter on the ground of humanity, claiming that the benefits to mankind would be incalculable and that it would save lives in the long run. It was when dealing with the Constitutionalists that he really sur-

passed himself, using such terms as: "Brand them! Split their tongues! Cut off their thumbs! Impale them!" etc. Mirabeau, Lafayette, Bailly and Condorcet were especial objects of his venom, but he assailed practically every one else, including Danton and Desmoulins, and the heroes of the Bastille, Maillard and Hulin. The only front-rank leader of the Revolution whom he practically never attacked and often praised was Robespierre.

It must have been that he recognized Robespierre's fundamental sincerity and the essential similarity of their views. For in spite of his ferocious mode of propaganda, Marat preached no exaggerated social doctrine. His programme of social reform did not differ greatly from Robespierre's, and he was as indignant as the latter with the anarcho-communists—the *Enragés*—such as Jacques Roux and Leclerc. In tactics, however, they were far apart. Robespierre's method was the legal and democratic; Marat's, insurrectionary and dictatorial. The exigencies of war and civil war later compelled Robespierre to declare himself for a virtual dictatorship, but he was essentially a democrat, and his temperamental and intellectual leanings towards democratic rather than dictatorial procedure were largely responsible for his failure to use the latter method effectively during the supreme crisis of his career.

In his short autobiography Marat confesses to having been consumed all his life by a desire for glory. "At five I wanted to be a teacher; at fifteen, a university professor; at eighteen, an author; at twenty, a creative genius; and my desire now is to suffer martyrdom for my country." But if a desire for glory furnished the original impulse for getting him to seek martyrdom, his stubborn persistence in such a course calls for a different explanation. Marat genuinely loved and pitied

the common people. A significant difference between him and Robespierre was that Robespierre respected the people, but did not love it, while Marat loved the people, but did not respect it. To Robespierre the voice of the people had the somewhat mystic significance it had for Rousseau—to whom it was the Voice of God. To Marat it was but the voice of foolish, ignorant, fickle children, unable to manage their own affairs, and needing an enlightened few—or, better still, an enlightened dictator—to rule for and over them. Unquestionably he aspired at one time to dictatorship himself, and in this his ambition played a part, but it never was his controlling impulse.

His very ferocity sprang, in part from the quality of his love, in part from the quality of his nature, which was essentially feminine—inclined towards hysteria. Louis Blanc remarks that just as a high-strung woman might be driven to inconceivable acts of cruelty when seeing a helpless child mistreated, so Marat was thrown into paroxysms of rage, bordering on insanity, when he saw the people abused or betrayed. For this fire-eating revolutionary was at bottom tender-hearted. He, whose incitements to violence were in no small degree responsible for the September massacres, once saved a man from a mob, and could not witness any living thing—hardly even an insect—suffer. He, who so bitterly attacked the Girondins, in the end tried to save several of them. The letter found upon Charlotte Corday is a tribute to the essential charity of his nature. He gave away all he had, and having nothing more to give, would call on his friends to help him feed his poor. The fashionable medico, who had charged as high as thirty-six francs for a visit and had had a marquise for a mistress, died in possession of a total capital of five sous! He was, undoubtedly, socially dangerous

and may have been unbalanced, but perhaps Panis was not altogether wrong when he compared him with the prophets of old, likewise not distinguished for mildness of temper, consistency or poise.

Such was the man who came to call on Robespierre that winter's day, in 1792.

II

Robespierre received him, no doubt, in the little reception-room back of the parlour where he usually received his visitors. The admiration of the Duplays for their lodger was sufficiently great to make that room a sort of shrine, decorated with pictorial and plastic representations of the "Incorruptible". A full-length portrait of him, painted by Gérard, hung opposite one of the two windows, which gave upon a convent garden; and one could likewise admire him painted by Eleonore, engraved and sketched on paper, and in statuette and medallion form.

As the two men stood, each summing up the other, they must have presented an interesting contrast. Robespierre, slim and graceful, in his well-cut, olive-brown coat, with his powdered hair, his spotless white stock, his delicate wristbands, his silver-buckled shoes; Marat, ill-favoured and dwarfish-looking, badly shaven, his soiled shirt open at the throat, a few locks of greying hair straying from under the handkerchief that served him for head covering.

From a statement made by Marat and corroborated by Robespierre, we know, in part, what was said at the interview, while Fabre d'Eglantine's description of Marat and his manner of speech enables us to reconstruct the scene with considerable historical accuracy. The first remark Robespierre made after greetings had

been exchanged was to express his regret that Marat, by his constant appeals to violence, should have destroyed the influence for good his paper had exercised in the beginning. But, said Robespierre—trying to be indulgent—no doubt, as far as the violence was concerned, Marat did not mean all he said. Whereupon Marat burst out:

“Know, that the cries of rage and protest you imagine I do not mean are among the mildest that well up in my heart! Know, that had I been able to rely upon the Paris populace, I would, after the infamous decree against the Nancy garrison, have extirpated the barbarians responsible for it! Know, that after the judgment rendered by the Châtelet court in the events of the 5th and 6th of October, I would have burned at the stake the iniquitous judges of that infamous tribunal! Know, that if after the massacre of the Champ-de-Mars I had been able to find two thousand men animated by the same sentiments that wrung my heart, I would have stabbed to death the general in the midst of his cohorts, burned the despot in his palace, and impaled the atrocious representatives in their seats, as I then advised to do!”

His sonorous voice shook with passion as he spoke. A slight defect of speech, which caused him to pronounce the *c* and *s* as *g*, seemed to give the tirade even greater explosive force. His face had taken on a sardonic expression, and he gesticulated wildly. Now and then he would raise himself on his toes, as if borne upward by the force of his passion, and he punctuated each sentence by stamping his foot. “Robespierre”, he reports, “listened to me with horror. He paled visibly, and for some time remained silent.”

Marat does not give us Robespierre’s reply. The latter, in his statement, merely says he told Marat that

he did not agree with him. Charlotte reports that her brother reproached Marat severely with compromising the Revolution, and told him that the scaffold was a fatal weapon, which should be used sparingly, and only when the country was in gravest danger.

"You don't understand me", Marat replied.

And Robespierre, curtly: "That's possible".

One of the accusations levelled against Robespierre on the 9th of Thermidor was that he had not understood Marat!

"The interview", says Marat, "confirmed me in the opinion I had always had of him—that he combined the wisdom of a wise legislator with the integrity of a truly honest man and the zeal of a staunch patriot, but lacked the breadth of vision and the audacity of the statesman."

It is interesting to speculate on what would have happened had Charlotte Corday not cut short Marat's career. It may be that he and Robespierre would not have clashed, for Marat later proved that, if he wished, he could keep himself well under control. He could hardly have found fault with the Terror, and might have been among the staunchest supporters of the Committee of Public Safety. It is significant, however, that as long as Robespierre remained in power, Marat's body did not enter the Panthéon for that short sojourn a fickle public opinion later vouchsafed it.

III

To declare war on Austria was to declare war on Prussia, its ally. Two hundred thousand Austrians and Prussians were menacing the frontier. Everybody was morally certain that the court was betraying. The courtiers openly rejoiced at the French reverses.

Madame Campan—one of the Queen's ladies-in-waiting—relates in her memoirs how Marie Antoinette followed eagerly on the map the advance of the Prussians under the Duke of Brunswick. He was now in Longwy; on such a day he would be in Verdun; on such another he would reach Paris. . . . There exists a letter in cipher from Marie Antoinette to the former Austrian ambassador—Mercy d'Argenteau—in which the Queen communicates French war secrets. At her trial, a former Minister of War—the royalist La Tour du Pin—reluctantly testified that she had required him to furnish her information regarding the French armies.

Robespierre, faithful to his policy of bringing about changes with as little social disturbance as possible, for a long time did not favour insurrection. The King's veto was paralysing national defence, but in order to be valid it had to be countersigned by the ministers, who, if they did so, could be charged with treason and hailed before the Supreme Court. The King himself, if suspected of trafficking with the enemy, could be suspended by the Assembly.

But the Assembly appeared paralysed. It feared the Jacobins as much as it feared the court. Afraid lest by moving against the court it give more power to the Jacobins, it did nothing, while the situation became hourly worse. The Girondins tried to bring the King to reason by having the Paris populace pay a visit to him at his palace. The effect was disappointing. Louis gave a fairly good demonstration of the "passive courage" Malouet credits him with. He donned the red cap, but conceded nothing.

Lafayette, indignant at the insult to royalty, came hurrying back from the front and read the Assembly a lecture. Robespierre, likewise indignant, if for somewhat different reasons, lectured Lafayette, the King and

the tribune at the Assembly he shouted at Robespierre and his Jacobins: "If there are men who aim to establish a republic on the ruins of the constitution, the sword of the law should strike them, as it should the counter-revolutionaries at Coblenz". To this Robespierre replied: "The nation must be saved at any cost. Only that which threatens national ruin is unconstitutional. In circumstances such as these ordinary means no longer suffice. Frenchmen, save yourselves!"

IV

But a revolutionary leader who at a time of crisis confines himself to telling his followers to save themselves, is lacking in important qualities of leadership. Once Robespierre had decided that an insurrection was necessary, he should have assumed full responsibility. It would not have been necessary for him to have taken command himself—a task for which he was unfitted—but he should have seen to it that a capable commander-in-chief was appointed, who would take orders either from him or from a revolutionary committee, as did Hanriot the following year. At the time of the attack on the Tuileries it was known that the King and his family were no longer at the palace, but had taken refuge with the Assembly. A forceful, determined leader would have placed them under arrest, would have forced Louis to sign an order for the Swiss to lay down their arms, and thus have saved hundreds of lives. But there was no real plan and no genuine leadership. On this and other occasions Robespierre proved himself deficient as a man of action.

It would appear that the other insurrectionary leaders did not want him to compromise himself irretrievably. No doubt they thought that if the action

miscarried they would need him all the more. Had he not after the Champ-de-Mars massacre admirably succeeded in rallying the demoralized revolutionary forces and skilfully appeased the wrath of the Assembly? It is significant that he was not elected a member of the Insurrectionary Commune until the 11th of August, when all danger was past, yet, no sooner elected, became the undisputed leader.

The Girondin Carra relates that on the evening of the 4th of August a conference of some of the leaders of the proposed insurrection was held in the room of Antoine, who lodged with the Duplays. Towards the end of the conference, Madame Duplay, who had got wind of what was happening, rushed in excitedly, and confronting Antoine wanted to know if he wished to see Robespierre massacred.

"If anybody is massacred it will, no doubt, be we", replied Antoine. "As for Robespierre, all we want him to do is to remain in hiding."

Barbaroux claims that a few days before the revolt, Panis, a great admirer of the Jacobin leader, asked him to come to the Duplay house for a conference with Robespierre. Barbaroux went, accompanied by his friends Baille and Rebecqui. Robespierre received them in the little reception-room, where his likeness figured so prominently in the decorations. Says Barbaroux: "He was painted on the right, engraved on the left, his bust was at the back and his bas-relief opposite. There were, besides, on the table, a half-dozen Robespierres in little prints."

The conversation was mainly about the advisability of moving the Marseillais to the Cordelier Club, nearer the scene of the proposed action. Then Robespierre is supposed to have remarked that—assuming the action to be successful—it would be advisable to place some-

body in great favour with the populace at the head of affairs, as otherwise there was danger of the Revolution coming to a halt.

"I have no more use for a dictator than for a king", Rebecqui is reported to have replied, and Robespierre did not press the matter further.

Once they were outside again, Panis is supposed to have said: "You did not catch his meaning. It was only a question of temporary authority. Robespierre is just the man we need at the head".

To which Barbaroux: "Say no more! The Marseillais will never bow to a dictator".

To what extent is Barbaroux—a very imaginative young man—to be believed? He told his story at the Convention, where Panis gave him the lie. Robespierre dryly commented: "I like Barbaroux, he lies with such a noble mien". Yet, it is difficult to believe that Barbaroux, and Rebecqui, who corroborated him, wholly invented the incident. That Robespierre made some such remark is highly probable. The insurrection was directed not only against the King, but likewise against the Assembly, which wished to keep him in office. If it succeeded, there would be no national governing body whose views corresponded with those of the victors. This situation called for a temporary dictatorship. Barbaroux made the charge under circumstances when any admission on Robespierre's part, however qualified, would have been misconstrued. Since Barbaroux, no doubt, somewhat distorted what had been said, it is conceivable that Robespierre took advantage of this to make a not very specific denial.

Still another visitor to the Duplay house on the eve of the insurrection was Pétion, who as Mayor of Paris came to ask his friend to intervene. Pétion was the most puzzled man in Paris. He wanted to be faithful to his

oath of office and to the Revolution. He finished by being disloyal to both. Robespierre, on listening to him, must have felt content that he himself had kept clear of such entangling situations by not aspiring to any office except that of people's representative. There is no reason to believe that Robespierre could have stopped the insurrection had he tried, but he had no desire to try. Pétion departed meditating on the difficulty of reconciling the irreconcilable.

V

It was Brunswick's manifesto of July 28, 1792, that gave the final impetus to the insurrection. It had been prepared at the direction of Marie Antoinette by her foreign agents. The manifesto threatened Paris with utter destruction if a single hair of the royal heads was harmed, held all public officials personally responsible for the safety of the King and his family, and proclaimed the French soldiers resisting foreign invasion rebels to the King of France! It made it plain, even to the dullest, that Louis was fighting his own people with foreign armies.

And so, on August 10, 1792, the monarchy fell to the scream of tocsins, the booming of cannon, the crackle of rifle-fire—to cries of rage, and pain, and despair and triumph. When the Tuileries were attacked the royal household was no longer there. It had been awakened by the tolling of the bell of St. Germain l'Auxerrois, the same that had tolled on St. Bartholomew. The King had been up all night. Towards morning he had slumbered in an armchair. When he awoke he sat for a while, heavy-eyed, his hair grotesquely flattened on one side where he had been leaning his head against the back of the chair. He was far from

being a born ruler. Nature, in fact, had cast him into the undistinguished mould of a prosperous bourgeois, or, at best, a country gentleman. Affairs of state bored him. His favourite occupations were hunting, which he had to forgo since coming to Paris, and tinkering with locks and keys in a room especially equipped for that purpose.

Tocsins were tolling all over the city. He got up, and without troubling to arrange his hair, went with the Queen and a few others to inspect the forces gathered for their defence. It was not an inspiring review. The handful of nobles who had answered the summons to come and protect their King had taken it for granted that suitable weapons would be furnished them, and finding there were none, had armed themselves as best they could with duelling swords, pokers, endirons—anything that happened to be handy. The red-coated Swiss looked more promising and shouted: "*Vive le roi!*" with a guttural accent. The few National Guard regiments from the bourgeois wards looked dubious and their "*Vive la nation!*" was not reassuring. Marie Antoinette thought to raise their morale by pointing to the nobles and saying: "These gentlemen will show you how one dies for one's King", but the effect was the very opposite of what she had expected. Finally, on the terrace of the Feuillants, a few *sans-culottes* hailed the ruler with the cry of "Down with the fat hog!" No, it was not an inspiring review.

Roederer came, took in the situation and said: "Sire, your only safety is with the Assembly".

Marie Antoinette demurred. She realized that to leave the palace now meant to abdicate. She looked at the King. Ah, if it had been Fersen, how valiantly he would have defended his crown! But the stolid man beside her bethought himself, and when Roederer

arned: "The whole city is marching", heaved a windy sigh and said: "Let's go then".

They went: the royal family, Roederer, members of the cabinet and the court. They walked through the garden of the Tuileries, past the nobles, who looked somewhat pained at this desertion—past the Swiss, who hoped this meant there would be no fighting—past the National Guard, which immediately made up its mind it would not fight for an empty palace—towards the Salle du Manège. The little Dauphin amused himself kicking the fallen leaves under the feet of his elders, and the King said musingly: "The leaves are falling early this year". The Procurator of the Commune—Manuel—had prophesied that the monarchy would fall before the trees shed their foliage.

There is at the Carnavalet a tragic bit of paper on which, in a straggling hand, are written the words: "The King commands the Swiss to lay down their arms instantly and withdraw to their barracks. Louis." The still barracks of death alone were awaiting them! He did not give the order to cease firing until all hope of victory had fled. Perhaps—since the risk was mostly theirs—he was not unwilling that a trial of strength should be made. And while outside men were dying in his cause, he sat—not stoically self-controlled, but coldly unaffected—munching a peach in the stenographers' lodge at the Assembly, and when the painter David happened to walk past, inquired of him how he was getting on with his portrait.

Robespierre, as has been said, was elected member of the Insurrectionary Commune the day after the revolt. That extra-legal body had ousted the regularly elected municipal counsellors—the Three Hundred—and had assumed power. It was composed of delegates from the forty-eight Paris sections—organizations

somewhat resembling New England town hall meetings. Pétion, while nominally still head of the city government, was virtually a prisoner; Robespierre became the unofficial Mayor of Paris.

When Louis had come to seek shelter in the Salle du Manège, the President of the Assembly—Vergniaud—had thus addressed him:

“Sire, you may count on the firmness of the National Assembly. Its members have sworn to die upholding the rights of the people and the constituted authorities.”

There can, therefore, be no doubt that the insurrection was directed against the Assembly as well as against the King. Why then was the Assembly allowed to continue to function after the monarchy had fallen? Why did not the Insurrectionary Commune dismiss the Assembly—as it had already dismissed the Three Hundred—and govern the nation, as well as Paris, until a new Assembly could be chosen? Had this been done, there would have been no fatal conflict of authority during a most critical period; there might have been no massacres, and there would have been a majority for Robespierre’s policies in the Convention from the very start. Had Robespierre insisted on such a course, it would have been followed. Why did he not insist on it, or even recommend it? Because, as Marat had said, he lacked audacity. He was too prudent, too legalistic, too much inclined to trust to time and mere words to bring forth events. He now contented himself with half-measures. He advised that emissaries be sent to all the Departments, and twenty-four were sent, but soon found themselves in conflict with commissioners from the Assembly and those sent out by the Gironde Minister of the Interior—Roland—who had been reinstated in office. Besides, the agents of the Commune were badly chosen, and their ultra-radical

talk did not dispose the Departments favourably towards Paris.

Nevertheless, Robespierre was now more influential than ever. We see him striding self-confidently into the Assembly at the head of a delegation, and telling it politely, but firmly, what was expected of it. The Girondins never forgave him this triumph. From that day on they saw, or pretended to see, in him a potential dictator. The Assembly—which must have been somewhat surprised at finding itself still in existence—swallowed the bitter pill, but soon started to reach out for its former power. Whenever the Commune would growl menacingly, the Assembly would usually finish by yielding, but there was endless bickering in the face of the steady advance of the victorious Prussians.

Among the emergency measures passed was that creating a Revolutionary Tribunal, which was to judge the vanquished of the 10th of August—the imprisoned Swiss and royalists. Robespierre was promptly elected president of the tribunal and just as promptly declined. He gave as a reason that many of the accused were his personal enemies, over whom, in fairness, he could not sit in judgment. It has been justly remarked that this was only a subterfuge, and that an identical excuse could have been made by practically every man of prominence. The issue was, in truth, a most delicate one. The populace wanted not justice, but vengeance. To have been just would have meant not only to lose favour with the populace, but to risk provoking a massacre, the danger of which became hourly greater, as the Prussians drew nearer to the capital. What Paris needed at that time was not a just, or even stern judge, but a merciful executioner—somebody who, like Mailard, during the massacres, would throw justice overboard and show such mercy as he could. Robespierre

did not relish the task and declined with a plausible subterfuge. Perhaps he also felt that he could not afford to wear himself out in a minor part, but must save himself for the principal work at hand.

VI

The 2nd of September, 1792, was a Sunday. Robespierre got up early and went to attend the meeting of the Electoral Assembly, which that day was to hold its opening session. The streets had their usual Sunday aspect. Church bells tolled—not as clamorously as in the past, for many bells had been melted into cannon balls. The hand of the Commune had even reached into the burial vaults, and the ancient dead had been made to contribute the lead of their coffins to the cause of national defence.

In spite of the apparent peaceful aspect of things the situation was most ominous, and the news reaching Paris that day was to make it appear desperate. For that day the Parisians were to learn that Verdun was invested and Brunswick only twenty-four hours' march from the capital, while at the same time news arrived of the royalist uprising in the Vendée. And while a black flag with the legend: "Citizens, the Fatherland is in danger!" made its appearance at a window of the City Hall and recruiting started feverishly, rumour spread through the city that the royalists meant to take advantage of the situation to storm the prisons, deliver their leaders, massacre the republicans and hand the city over to Brunswick.

Such were the causes of the massacres which began in the afternoon of the 2nd of September and lasted until the 6th. A mystic exaltation took possession of many of the killers, and there may be truth in the story

that one of them came to Marat and confessed with tears in his eyes that he had had the weakness to spare a royalist. Probably not more than 400 men and boys were actually engaged in despatching the 1100 prisoners that were killed, but the conscience of the city approved. The Committee of Surveillance of the Commune, of which Marat was a member, and the Minister of Justice—Danton—gave them active encouragement. Danton later explained to the Duke of Chartres: "I wanted the youth of Paris to arrive in Champagne covered with blood, which would be a guarantee of its loyalty. I wanted to put a river of blood between it and the *émigrés*."

No historian of standing accuses Robespierre of being in any way responsible for the massacres, but even his admirer Louis Blanc criticizes him severely for having done little or nothing to stop the slaughter. Charlotte says that her brother bitterly blamed Pétion for failing to intervene. Pétion is said to have replied: "Nothing on earth could have saved the prisoners!" But why should Maximilien have blamed Pétion? Anything Pétion could do, he likewise could have done. Moreover, Pétion addressed the mob at one of the prisons, while Robespierre did not do even that. It may be conceded that there was not a great deal he could have done. Circumstances made the use of force impossible. To have fired upon the people at such a time would have meant taking a frightful responsibility. It might have resulted in civil war and anarchy while the enemy was marching upon the city. Robespierre, in his reply to Louvet, made this clear when he said: "I have been calmly told that the municipality should have proclaimed martial law. Martial law at the approach of the enemy! Martial law after the 10th of August! Martial law against the people for the

accomplices of the dethroned despot!"

It may likewise be granted that the General Council of the Commune, of which he was a member, did the two things that appeared most practical: it sent commissioners to reason with the mobs, and ordered, as a precaution, all prisoners held for civil causes released from whatever prison they found themselves in. To have released all the prisoners could, under the circumstances, not have been thought of.

Yet, when all this has been said, one still asks oneself why Robespierre, the most influential man in Paris, put forth so little personal effort to stop the slaughter. One still asks oneself why at least he did not go to the prisons and address the crowds. He was not a mob orator, but neither was Pétion. He is said to have pleaded with Danton—undoubtedly best fitted for the task—to appeal to the populace. Danton refused. Presumably Robespierre did not go himself because he considered it a useless gesture. But there are times when even a gesture, however futile, may be the only thing that can justify a man to himself—not to speak of his fellow men, and in the case of a man like him, of posterity. He failed to make the gesture and lost an opportunity.

The most practical work of mercy was done by Maillard, the same who on a certain stormy day in October had marched at the head of the women to Versailles to bring the King to Paris. He presided at an *impromptu* tribunal in the court of the *Abbaye* prison. Huge, swarthy, clad in grey, a sword at his thigh, he sat through the night with his fellow judges at a table on which prison records, hunks of bread, glasses, bottles of wine, and other bottles in which candles were stuck, stood or lay about in picturesque confusion. The flare of torches illumined the grim faces

of the judges, the red-capped, blood-stained butchers, armed with pikes, swords, axes or meat cleavers, and the ashen faces of the prisoners, as one by one they were brought before the tribunal. Maillard questioned them gruffly, handed out rough justice, saved whom he could. "We are not here to judge opinions, only acts", he said once. There is in existence a blood-stained prison record with, behind each name, the entry: "Executed by judgment of the people. Maillard", or "Absolved by the people. Maillard." It is his glory or his shame, depending upon the viewpoint of the beholder. Forty-three were saved by Maillard's court, who otherwise certainly would have perished.

When a prisoner was freed there would be cheering, and he would be escorted to safety and frequently led home in triumph. "Hats off to the innocent!" the escort would shout to the passers-by. If, by glancing at each other and nodding, the judges rendered the verdict of guilty, the prisoner would not be told, but the command given: "Let the gentleman go". The gate would open, and as the unfortunate, faint with relief and joy, would step outside to claim the gift of life and freedom, he would be quickly despatched with pike thrusts and sabre blows, amidst a silence pierced only by his own anguished cries.

So gruesomely fantastic an occurrence could hardly have taken place without giving birth to legends even more gruesomely fantastic. Thus, for example, the story of the glassful of human blood, supposed to have been drunk by Mademoiselle de Sombreuil to save her father, found its origin in a tumbler filled with red wine handed her to keep her from fainting! Lamartine is responsible for giving currency to most of these legends by taking all of them seriously in his romantic *History of the Girondins*.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE GIRONDE ATTACKS

I

IN the house in the Rue des Rapporteurs, in Arras, Charlotte Robespierre was packing. She and Augustin were going to Paris. He as well as his brother had been elected to the Convention. Maximilien's popularity in Paris and in his home district had shone forth brightly during the election. In both, he had been the first choice of the electors. He had accepted the Paris mandate.

Augustin had been elected from Paris, and while his election was, no doubt, largely due to a desire to please his brother, it cannot be said that Robespierre did anything to promote Augustin's chances. Not that Augustin was not fully qualified for the office. At the time of his election he was Member of the Administrative Council of the Department of Pas-de-Calais and President of the Jacobin Club of Arras. Some of Robespierre's biographers have treated him rather lightly. Belloc dismisses him with the statement that "he had never done much good to himself or much evil to the public". This is hardly doing him justice. Augustin, as a matter of fact, was one of the ablest and most merciful of the proconsuls. His conduct in Franche-Comté and the Alpes Maritimes stands out in vivid contrast to that of many of the other proconsuls, such as Carrier, Tallien, Collot d'Herbois, Fouché, Barras, Fréron, Lebon, etc. While they filled the prisons with suspects

and soaked the earth with blood, he emptied the prisons, which in Franche-Comté had been filled by his predecessor Bernard, and in the Alpes-Maritimes, by Barras and Fréron. If he erred at all, it was on the side of mercy. The decrees issued by him and Ricord in the Alpes-Maritimes were just, timely and effective. At the siege of Toulon he showed personal courage and qualities of real leadership. Together with his colleague Salicetti he led an attack upon the fortifications.

Little is known of his appearance and personal characteristics. Portraits existing of him differ widely. He is said to have been tall and comely. He was four years younger than his brother and took life far less seriously.

Augustin and Maximilien got along exceedingly well, and on public matters were in complete agreement. In a letter to Buissart—who had been a friend of their father before he became their confidant and adviser—Augustin alludes to a wrong Maximilien had done him, and for which he had made reparation. But this is the only record of any misunderstanding between them.

While in the Alpes-Maritimes, Augustin struck up an intimate friendship with Napoleon Bonaparte, whom he heartily recommends in a letter to his brother. Napoleon was a Jacobin and had at one time been president of a Jacobin Club. The Duke de Raguse relates in his memoirs that Napoleon said to him: "If Robespierre had remained in power, he would have established order and the reign of law without any great social disturbance".

Charlotte claims that Napoleon was so incensed at the death of the Robespierre brothers that he proposed to the commissioners then with his army to march upon the Convention. Her statement is given verisimilitude by the fact that the Thermidorians felt sufficiently un-

certain of the attitude he would adopt to have him arrested and imprisoned in the fortress at Antibes. From here he wrote a letter disavowing Robespierre, but the epistle is obviously opportunistic. 'Letters Napoleon wrote to Maximilien are said to have been returned to him by Courtois, who after Robespierre's death took charge of the latter's private papers. During the Consulate, Napoleon gave Charlotte—who after the death of her brothers had remained penniless—a pension of 3600 francs.

II

Charlotte and Augustin rented an apartment in the Duplay house. It was located on the first floor and gave on the Rue St. Honoré. A stair-landing connected it with the sleeping quarters of the Duplays and Robespierre's chamber.

Charlotte, from the very beginning, conceived a dislike for the Duplays, especially for Madame Duplay and Eleonore. She saw in them a pair of designing females bent on ensnaring her elder brother. Her attitude seems to have been prompted mainly by resentment at finding them occupying a place which, she felt, rightfully belonged to her. Her disappointment embittered still further a none too amiable disposition.

The youngest of the Duplay girls—Elisabeth (she whom her intimates called Babet)—felt sorry for her and often went to visit her. Sometimes she would comb and arrange her hair, at other times they would go out together. Among the places they visited were the Salle du Manège and the Jacobin Club. One day, while at the Salle du Manège with Charlotte, Elisabeth made the acquaintance of Philippe Lebas—a young deputy from Pas-de-Calais and a friend and admirer of Robespierre.

He sat down beside her, pointed out the celebrities on the floor and explained the subject of debate. On another occasion he gave Elisabeth his opera-glass, managing at the same time to secure her ring. There is something peculiarly naïve and touching about their little love affair, as related by Elisabeth in her memoirs—love, like a bird, fluttering pathetically above the leaping flames of the social upheaval! Elisabeth later became the wife of the man who proved himself one of the most admirable figures of the Revolution. She bore him a son, who became a distinguished historian and tutor to Napoleon III.

Charlotte, whose instincts were middle class and provincial, thought the humble abode of the cabinet-maker no suitable residence for so important a man as her brother. Besides, she wanted to get him away from the Duplays. She worried Robespierre until finally (probably in September, 1793) he consented to move with her and Augustin into an apartment in the Rue St. Florentin. It was a great triumph for Charlotte and a bitter disappointment for the Duplays.

But Robespierre felt far from happy in his new surroundings. He missed the family atmosphere of the Duplay household, the pleasant, youthful faces of the girls, the motherly solicitude of Madame Duplay, the friendly chat of the cabinetmaker. Charlotte's officious preoccupation with him, the primness with which she presided at table, were but poor compensation for the loss of all this.

One day he fell ill. It was not a serious illness, but when Madame Duplay heard of it she hurried over to see him. She found fault with Charlotte for having failed to notify her and with the way the patient was being cared for. She was a redoubtable woman, was Madame Duplay, and the prim Charlotte was no match

for her at all. As for the budding "dictator", he was wax in her hands. Before Robespierre knew what was happening, he had been bundled into a hackney and was on his way back to the Duplay house, probably not an unwilling victim. "They love me so much, they are so considerate and kind that it would be ingratitude to repulse them", he told his sister.

Charlotte and Augustin continued to live in the Rue St. Florentin. She and Madame Duplay were now hardly on speaking terms, and one day when Charlotte sent over her maid with some preserves for her brother, Madame Duplay—either in a burst of temper or with the deliberate intent of stopping Charlotte's visits—said curtly: "Take them back. I don't want her to poison Robespierre", and slammed the door. That of course terminated all further intercourse between them. Robespierre thought it wiser not to intervene. When he wanted to see Charlotte (which was not often) he went to the Rue St. Florentin.

Later, Charlotte accompanied Augustin on his mission to the Alpes-Maritimes. Two others in the party were Augustin's fellow-commissioner Ricord and his pretty, light-minded young wife. Charlotte was not destined to keep the peace with others of her sex. She soon managed to pick a quarrel with Madame Ricord, whom she accused of unbecoming conduct with her brother. She tells a somewhat fanciful story of how she happened to leave the party, but the truth appears to be that she departed in a temper. Back in Paris, she seems to have wagged her tongue rather carelessly, and when Augustin returned he refused to live with her and went to lodge with the Ricords. "Our sister has not a drop of blood in her veins akin to ours", he wrote to Maximilien. "What I have seen and learned concerning her convinces me that she is our most bitter enemy." He

suggested that Charlotte be sent back to Arras. The Terror was then in progress, and Joseph Lebon had just been ordered by the Committee of Public Safety to go to Arras, where he managed to acquire a rather sanguinary reputation. Robespierre thought that if Charlotte went to Arras, Lebon might as well act as her escort. From this the Thermidorians concocted the story that he meant to have his sister executed!

But Charlotte did not return to Arras. She packed her belongings and left the apartment, after writing a spiteful letter to Augustin. In later years she had difficulty to explain this letter and claimed it to have been interpolated by Robespierre's enemies. She never saw her younger brother again. Maximilien she saw on one or two occasions, but only in the presence of others. He did not disguise the fact that he was displeased with her conduct.

Charlotte never married. The ex-priest and seminary teacher Fouché—who was a deputy to the Convention and destined to become Minister of Police, one of the wealthiest men in Europe and Duke of Otranto—asked for her hand shortly before his departure for Lyon. At the time of his proposal he had a wife and child in Nantes, so that, evidently, he meant to obtain a divorce in order to become Robespierre's brother-in-law. Thus the solitary virtue of loyalty to his family, granted him by some of his biographers, seems to have little foundation. Charlotte looked with favour upon the suit, and Robespierre raised no objections until Fouché had made his sorry record in Lyon. Then Fouché became one of the half-dozen men he most bitterly hated, and there could be no further talk of marriage. Charlotte, however, continued to meet Fouché occasionally in the Tuileries garden. She seemed to have had none of that aversion for him

he inspired in Robespierre after the Lyon mission.

Charlotte's conduct following her brothers' death was hardly heroic. She temporarily changed her name to Carrault—her mother's maiden name—and disavowed her brothers in an application she made to the Thermidorians for a pension. Later, when the slander heaped upon Maximilien and Augustin began to be dissipated and a revival of the revolutionary spirit in France considerably raised their repute, Charlotte tried to make it appear that she had never wavered in her loyalty. She lived for forty years after her brothers' death, dying in August, 1834. The pension given her by Napoleon continued, curiously, to be paid to her under all successive régimes.

III

On the 20th of September, 1792, at 5.30 P.M., while the guns were still booming at Valmy, where the united armies of Dumouriez and Kellermann halted the onward march of Brunswick, the Convention assembled in the theatre of the Tuileries. The following day it met at the Salle du Manège, where it was to continue to hold its sessions until May of the following year.

France, for the present at least, was saved from invasion. Brunswick, looking out over the battlefield through the curtain of torrential rain, seeing his disciplined battalions recoil before Dumouriez' despised volunteers and noting the surprising accuracy of the French artillery, remarked: "*Hier schlagen wir nicht*" (We won't win here), and ordered the retreat. Goethe, who was with his army, said with the prophetic insight sometimes given to poets: "From this spot and from this day dates a new era in the history of the world".

And now, for the next few months, the Convention

would deliberate in an atmosphere electric with the growing exultation of victory. The Prussians were forced to abandon Verdun and Longwy, and from the Mediterranean to the Netherlands the ragged, ill-equipped armies of the young Republic began their astounding advance. The Revolution had released potentialities of the human spirit and resources of the social organism that made the old world gasp. For a while it even seemed as if Brissot's dream of entire populations welcoming the French as liberators was destined to come true. Danselme took Nice without a blow, and the city sent emissaries to the Convention asking to be incorporated in the Republic. Montesquiou was welcomed in Savoy, long restive under the yoke of Piedmont. Custine took Mayence and Frankfort without meeting serious resistance. Finally, Dumouriez, after decisively defeating the Austrians at Jemmapes, invaded Belgium and hoisted the tricolour over Brussels!

And so, in his foreign policy, Brissot seemed amply justified, and Robespierre appeared to have been a poor prophet after all. In other ways, too, his position was greatly weakened. As a result of his failure to attack immediately after the fall of the monarchy, his opponents had been able to gain strength. Brissot claimed two-thirds of the deputies to the Convention. The claim was somewhat presumptuous. In reality not more than a third were avowedly of his party. Robespierre commanded an equal number, or perhaps even a few more. But the remaining third, shocked by the September massacres and under the spell of the victories, were to vote with the Girondins during the opening months, and continued to give them valuable support until their final overthrow. This remaining third was known as the Plain. Its leaders were Barère

and Sieyès. As a result of that support, the Girondins controlled the cabinet and most of the important committees, and were able to place hundreds of their adherents in government offices.

Robespierre's followers were known as the Mountain, because of the location of their seats, which were high up. Over the Mountain hung, like a sanguinary cloud, the shadow of the September massacres, for with it sat the Paris delegation, and with that delegation the man whose name, more than any other, was associated with the massacres—Marat. Marat's presence and the growing public indignation at the massacres made the Mountain vulnerable. Robespierre, as the acknowledged leader, would have to bear the brunt of attack.

Jaurès—who in his double capacity of historian and practical political leader is peculiarly qualified to speak on this subject—says that the difference between the Gironde and the Mountain was mainly this: the Gironde believed in unrestricted freedom of trade and contract—in other words, in a policy of *laissez-faire*, which would give the bourgeoisie elbow-room for commercial and industrial expansion. Needless to say, such a policy would have left the workers at the mercy of the employers. The Mountain wished to restrict and hedge about the freedom of the bourgeoisie for the benefit of the workers. Thus the Girondins were now a part of the Right. They were occupying the place once held by the Constitutionalists.

Robespierre was perfectly aware of the class nature of the struggle. "Your programme", he said to the Gironde, "is absolute liberty of trade, and bayonets to still the anxiety and the hunger of the people." And at another time, during a speech at the Club: "Observe how it is to them [the Girondins] that the rich rally. They are the so-called decent people, the cream of society (*les*

gens comme il faut); we are the *sans-culottes*, we are the *canaille*."

IV

Five days after the opening of the Convention the Gironde made its first attack upon Robespierre. It was precipitated by Rebecqui, Barbaroux' friend from Marseilles. Osselin, of the Paris delegation, was speaking in defence of the Commune, when Rebecqui interrupted him with the words:

"The faction that has been accused and whose intention it is to establish a dictatorship is that of Robespierre. It is to combat that faction that we have been sent here. I denounce its projects here and now!"

Robespierre remained unperturbed, while Danton—destined to serve frequently as a buffer—tried to allay the threatening storm. Then Robespierre obtained the floor and walked towards the tribune. To many of the new deputies he was a figure half heroic, half sinister. All were anxious to hear him. He spoke . . . and made one of the worst speeches of his career.

Nodier has said that Robespierre incarnated the Revolution. This is true to a certain extent, incongruous as it may seem that a methodical, spectacled, Puritanical country lawyer should have been the most representative figure of so turbulent and heroic an era. But not the least of Robespierre's weaknesses lay in the fact that he was altogether too conscious of the peculiar position he had come to occupy. He identified himself with the Revolution to such an extent that he frequently imagined he was speaking about the Revolution when only talking about himself. Marat has said in Robespierre's defence that he could not be blamed for this, since the attacks upon him were of a highly personal nature. But he who loved the classics so well should

have remembered Epictetus' saying when told that a certain man had slandered him: "The man does not know my other faults, or he would have mentioned these also". Robespierre would have been a greater man had he been able to ignore most of such attacks. No man can be constantly speaking in his own defence without developing in the end what wellnigh amounts to a persecution mania. The charge made by psychologists that he was a paranoiac is, undoubtedly, exaggerated, but one can easily understand why it was made.

On the present occasion he indulged in a lengthy and tedious review of his political career. He was listened to with impatience and frequently interrupted. Did he contemplate a dictatorship—yes, or no? He replied that his record was a sufficient answer.

He had hardly left the tribune when Barbaroux was on his feet.

"Barbaroux of Marseilles presents himself to corroborate the accusation made by the citizen Rebecqui against Robespierre", he said sententiously.

He then proceeded to give an account of what was supposed to have taken place at the Duplay house, on the eve of the insurrection. Panis, whom he accused of having been Robespierre's mouthpiece, got up indignantly and declared:

"I attest under oath that I never said a single word to Barbaroux that did not relate to the transfer of the Marseillais, and that I never so much as mentioned a dictatorship."

A more serious charge was made by Vergniaud.

On the 2nd of September, in the late afternoon, when the massacres had already begun, Robespierre spoke at the Commune. During his speech he accused Brissot, Carra, Guadet, Condorcet, him (Vergniaud) and other Girondins of wishing to place the Duke of

Brunswick upon the throne of France. Thus (Vergniaud charged by inference) Robespierre had tried to get his opponents massacred.

"That's false!" cried Sargent.

"I congratulate myself on this denial, which proves that Robespierre too might have been slandered", replied Vergniaud. He looked at Robespierre, as if expecting him to rise and confirm the denial. Robespierre did not rise. Later, in his reply to Louvet, he took up the charge and refuted the imputation, but did not deny having made the accusation against some of the Girondins—notably Brissot and Carra. Had the charge any basis in fact and was he justified in making it?

Narbonne, who as Minister of War had been Brissot's ally, had actually made such an offer to Brunswick. Carra—the Gironde's most popular journalist—at one time proposed the Duke of York, at another, Brunswick, as Louis' successor. As late as the 25th of July of that year he had lauded Brunswick in his paper as "the greatest warrior and political figure of Europe. If he reaches Paris I'll wager that his first act will be to come to the Jacobins and don the red cap." Barère charges in his memoirs that Brissot, before the Committee of Twelve, likewise proposed the Duke of York for the French throne. Condorcet, in May of that year, had grown enthusiastic about Brunswick in his paper.

On the surface it would, therefore, appear that Robespierre was justified. Brunswick was marching upon Paris; his admirers within were making a bid for the votes of the electors. Brunswick was the King's ally; the Girondins had supported the King until the very last moment. It is quite conceivable that the bourgeoisie, which they represented, would have preferred Brunswick to the Commune. Cloots charges that Longwy surrendered not from fear of the Prussians,

but from fear of the "agrarian law" advocated by the workers. Yet we know that, far from secretly rejoicing at Brunswick's advance, the Girondins were in a panic. Roland was perusing maps, wondering whither to retire the government. Barbaroux tells us that he considered the Midi, Corsica, even the Vendée! In fact, but for Danton, the Gironde government probably would have fled. Robespierre must have known this, and could not have seriously thought that the Gironde had an alliance with Brunswick. His statement at the Commune was, therefore, purely political. The author does not believe that he meant to have his opponents massacred, and it is doubtful if Vergniaud believed it himself. Robespierre explained later that at the time he made the statement only vague rumours of the massacres had reached him, and that, furthermore, it would never have occurred to him that any one would dare raise a hand against a member of the Assembly. Yet it is obvious that in order to gain a partisan advantage he made a charge which, basically, he knew to be unfounded. It was fortunate for him as well as for the Girondins that the consequences did not prove tragical.

V

The Girondins believed that if the Convention was to deliberate in safety it should be protected from interference by the Paris populace and the Commune, hence they demanded a guard of *Fédérés* from the provinces. Robespierre was opposed to such a guard, partly because he wished to avoid friction between the capital and the rest of the country, partly because he wanted the Commune to be able, if necessary, to bring pressure to bear upon the Convention—precisely what the Gironde did not want.

One will ask how he reconciled this with his ideal of democracy. It is, however, part of Rousseau's philosophy that the soul of the people may reside in an enlightened minority, which, by reason of this, acquires the right to act on the people's behalf. The significance of such a doctrine is obvious. Stripped of metaphysical habiliments it is at the basis of modern Communist and Fascist doctrine, and the very negation of democracy. To Robespierre the enlightened minority was the ✓ Jacobins, the Commune, the working-men of the faubourgs, and he was all the more ready to believe in their mission since their intervention had always been in his favour.

The Plain saw, like him, serious danger of civil war in the Gironde proposal and refused to support it, but although it failed to pass, some of the Gironde Departments sent contingents to Paris anyway, and at the beginning of November, 1792, there were some 5000 of the new *Fédérés* in Paris. The situation was extremely delicate. In the towns and villages through which they had passed the *Fédérés* had boasted that they were going to Paris to curb the followers of Robespierre and Marat. Barely arrived, they openly showed their hostility, marching through the streets singing:

"The head of Marat, Robespierre and Danton,
And all who stand up in their defence."

Girey-Dupré, a clever journalist who worked on Brissot's paper, concocted the following ditty, which was sung to a tune of that day:

"Followed by his devotees
And by his court surrounded,
The god of the *sans-culottes*,
Robespierre, has entered.

“‘I denounce you all,’ cried the pale orator;
 ‘Jesus, they are intriguants,
 Who burn incense unto Thee,
 Due unto me alone!’ ”

Robespierre must be given credit for urging his followers to abstain from any counter-demonstration and to exercise self-control. He claimed that Brissot and Roland deliberately wished to provoke bloodshed, so as to gain the support of the Plain for their proposal to move the Convention to Bourges. While Roland was extremely tactless, he was hardly the man to harbour so sinister a design.

With drunken soldiers swaggering through the streets, clamouring for his head, Robespierre's friends began to fear for his life. Unknown to him, they took measures to protect him. A printer by the name of Nicolas, and a locksmith, Didier, followed him wherever he went. Madame Lebas tells us that when Robespierre discovered that he was being guarded he demanded that the guard be withdrawn, but his friends would not heed him. There is the well-authenticated story of a self-appointed anonymous guard, a huge fellow from the Halles, who after working all night would station himself, armed with a cudgel, every morning close to the Duplay house and accompany Robespierre at a little distance to the Salle du Manège. Evening would find him again at the door of the building, and he would not depart until he knew his idol to be safely at home.

VI

The Girondins were called by their contemporaries Brissotins or Rolandists, for Madame Roland shared with Brissot the honour of being their leader. Her in-

fluence has been exaggerated, although Hébert, who at times does not lack insight, pays the following tribute to her power: "The tender half of the virtuous Roland leads France to-day on a leash as did once the Pompadours and the du Barrys. Brissot is the Grand Equerry of this new queen; Louvet, her Chamberlain; Buzot, her Grand Chancellor; Fauchet, her Almoner; Barbaroux, her Captain of the Guard; Vergniaud, her Grand Master of Ceremonies; Guadet, her Cup Bearer; Lanthenas, her Head Usher."

But, whatever her influence, it did not serve to allay passion, for Madame Roland was capable of great rancour. In fact, once she took a dislike to a man there was hardly any absurdity she would not believe of him. Thus, in her memoirs, she charges Danton and Fabre d'Églantine with nothing less than burglary.

As so many other women, Madame Roland had been a great admirer of Robespierre. Only a year before she had written him a long letter, in which she addressed him in the most flattering terms. But he had failed to come under her sway. Unlike his former friend Buzot, he had succumbed neither to the wiles of the politician nor to the charm of the woman, and when shortly after the 10th of August she wrote to him, asking him to come and see her so he might be shown the error of his ways, and he did not even trouble to reply, she regarded him as a lost sheep, and marked him for slaughter.

The grand assault on Robespierre of the 29th of October, 1792—the supreme effort made before Thermidor to stop his rise to power—seems to have originated with Madame Roland. The choice of Louvet as chief champion against him alone proves this. For why Louvet? Why not Vergniaud, so much more worthy of his mettle? Madame Roland did not like

Vergniaud. She was an ambitious woman, but before all a woman. She enjoyed having men court the favours of Madame Roland, the political leader, who by her ability had made a husband with the talents of a book-keeper Minister of the Interior and helped to steer the somewhat crazy course of the Gironde; but most of all she enjoyed having men court Manon Philipon, buxom and of an age when the years of a woman's sway over the hearts of men are numbered.

There were several men in her following—Lanthenas, Bancal, Buzot, Louvet—who did not merely admire the politician, but likewise the well-preserved, if somewhat matronly beauty. But Vergniaud—himself nearing forty—felt more attracted by the youthful charm and maidenly grace of a young actress, Made-moiselle Candaille, than by the mature voluptuousness of Madame Roland. He was, in fact, somewhat obvious in his indifference. So he was not among her favourites, and when it came to choosing some one to share with her husband the distinction of bringing down the Jacobin colossus, Louvet was chosen.

Louvet, too, had been an admirer of Robespierre, whom he had characterized as “beloved by the people, and, what is more, meriting that love”. He was a slightly built, blond young man of effeminate appearance, and affected a Bohemian nonchalance of dress. A premature baldness gave him a factitiously high forehead. He had pale-blue eyes—which, Madame Roland assures us, shot forth lightning—and was principally known as the author of a Rabelaisian novel—*The Adventures of the Chevalier de Faublas*—which had earned him the nickname of “Faublas”. But he was considered a literary man of parts, had been the editor of a political journal and had a reputation as an orator.

The sexagenarian Minister of the Interior opened the

attack. He had, as usual, a long report, in which he set out to describe the abandoned and deplorable state into which Paris and its Commune had fallen. It was so long that he did not attempt to read it himself, but left the task to one of his secretaries, with the characteristic remark: "If my chest were as strong as my courage is great, I would read it myself".

The report accused the Commune of having failed to furnish suitable barracks, beds and mattresses for the *Fédérés*. He had finally been forced to furnish the beds and mattresses himself. And now a dreadful thing had happened: some of the mattresses had disappeared! But such outrages were to be expected from a Commune composed of "false friends of the people, who hide their extravagance and their scoundrelism behind a mask of patriotism, and who have conceived the plan of starting an insurrection, by means of which they hope to raise themselves upon a heap of ruins and corpses, so that they might taste blood, gold and atrocities". However, it was not he—the dauntless Roland—who could be frightened by a Commune subsisting on a diet of "blood, gold and atrocities", and he assured the Convention for the one thousandth time that he would never waver in his duty, not if it were to cost him his life!

The Girondins, who apparently lacked a sense of humour, were delighted with the report, which they rewarded with hearty applause. But now Roland produced something that delighted them even more. It was a secret police report, made by a certain Mercandier, who had been secretary to Desmoulins, and had a criminal record. He stated that Fournier—a well-known violent character—had told him that the 2nd of September had been incomplete and that a new, "more copious blood-letting" was necessary. Roland,

Brissot and their clique—Fournier had vowed—had to be got out of the way, and would be disposed of before a fortnight was over. “I tremble”, commented the sensitive stool-pigeon, “at the horrors that are being prepared for us. They dislike Buzot very much, likewise Vergniaud, Guadet, Lasource, etc. All these they consider as belonging to the Roland clique. *The only one they will hear about is Robespierre.*”

This precious document the Minister of the Interior considered sufficiently relevant to be read to the Parliament of the nation in time of war!

No sooner had the Mercandier report been read than the word “Scoundrel!” was hurled at Robespierre from the Gironde benches. He, beside himself with indignation, jumped to his feet, demanding the floor on a question of personal privilege. Guadet was forced to recognize him, but the Jacobin leader was unable to make himself heard. The howls of the Gironde, systematic, organized, drowned out his voice, but not the voice of Danton, who roared above the din:

“Mr. President, I demand that the speaker be heard. And I demand the floor after him. It is time to bring this whole matter out into the open!”

Guadet, ringing the bell for silence, announced:

“Robespierre, you have the floor, but only to speak on the question whether or not the ministerial report, as a whole, should be published. The separate parts do not now concern us.”

This was depriving him of the opportunity to reply. Maximilien, who had climbed into the tribune, protested. The howls rose louder, shriller, fiercer.

“If you won’t listen to me,” he shouted, “if you keep interrupting on every possible pretext, if the chairman himself, instead of maintaining liberty of speech, uses pretexts, specious, to say the least . . .”

He had insulted the chair! The howls swelled into a roar. Guadet, obtaining silence for himself, said unctuously:

"Robespierre, you see the efforts I am making in your behalf. You have uttered another calumny, which I forgive you, and which I ask the Assembly to allow me to forgive you."

This magnanimity on the part of the chair was greeted with thunderous applause by the Gironde.

Once more Robespierre attempted to speak. Amidst the hurricane of howls, groans, boos and cries his voice could be heard, saying defiantly:

"There is not one among you who dares accuse me face to face and cite any positive fact against me. There is not one who dares mount this tribune and engage me in calm and serious debate . . ."

And then Louvet was seen making his way towards the tribune. Confronting Robespierre he said theatrically, in the manner of knights of old picking up a gage:

"I accept your challenge, Robespierre, and I demand the floor in order to present charges against you!"

"We, too!" shouted in unison the twins from Marseilles, Barbaroux and Rebecqui.

There was a lusty cheer from the Gironde benches, then silence. A foreboding of the tragedies to come seemed to hover over the Convention. Robespierre appeared bewildered. He realized suddenly—as he was to realize on that fatal day in Thermidor—that he was struggling against organized, sinister forces, leagued to destroy him. Louvet had climbed up beside him and repeated dramatically:

"Yes, Robespierre, it is I who accuse you."

"Go on! Go on, Robespierre!" shouted Danton.

"There are good citizens here who will listen to you!"

But Robespierre had already yielded the tribune.

Danton, however, would not have it so. He had asked for the floor after Robespierre and insisted on his rights. To howl him down was a prodigious task; nor did it seem necessary, since Louvet would get the floor immediately after him.

Danton spoke well. He pleaded for harmony. He tactfully rebuked Roland. To placate the Gironde he denounced Marat. But the Plain, no less than the Gironde, listened with impatience. It wanted to hear Louvet. He had promised facts, definite charges. So many vague insinuations had been made that the fulfilment of such a promise was something to look forward to. It was a relief to all when Danton concluded and Louvet reappeared in the tribune. He took his prepared speech from his pocket and began.

VII

Hate must, indeed, have blinded the Girondins to have induced them to add this fresh blunder to the many already committed. When one reads Louvet's speech one wonders how his friends, who must have read it beforehand, allowed him to deliver it. They evidently must have counted on organized mob spirit rather than on Louvet's argument to achieve the desired result. Here is Louvet's own summing up of the charges:

"Robespierre, I accuse you of having slandered unceasingly the noblest and best patriots.

"I accuse you of having slandered them with particular malice during the early days of September, when your calumnies placed their lives in jeopardy.

"I accuse you of having—as much as lay in your power—belittled and persecuted the National [Legislative] Assembly, and having incited others to disregard, belittle and persecute it.

"I accuse you of having permitted yourself to be treated continually as an idol, and having suffered people to call you, in your presence, the only virtuous man in France, the only one capable of saving the country, and of having said so yourself twenty times over.

"I accuse you of having, by means of terror and intrigue, tyrannized over the Electoral Assembly.

"I accuse you of having manifestly striven to obtain supreme power, as proved by the facts cited and by your entire conduct, which condemns you more than any speech of mine."

The following is a sample of the argument:

"Representatives of the people. A day for ever glorious—the 10th of August—had just brought salvation to France. Two days had passed. As a member of the Provisional General Council [of the Commune] I was at my post. A man enters. I look and can hardly believe my eyes. It was he, it was Robespierre. He came to take his seat as one of us. I am wrong! He had already gone to the executive desk. After that all equality was gone from among us."

Robespierre's comment that when listening to Louvet one was reminded of the boudoir does not appear unjustified.

One charge, however, appeared serious. It was the claim—which Danton's friend Delacroix corroborated—that Robespierre had threatened the Legislative Assembly with the tocsin if it failed to do his bidding. Louvet and Delacroix contradicted each other in that the first said the incident had taken place before a committee, while the second claimed it to have occurred at the Assembly. Nevertheless, it produced a sensation. It recalled to many of those present the humiliations they had had to endure from the Commune's spokes-

men immediately after the fall of the monarchy. That Robespierre himself was guiltless of that particular charge, that, in fact, he had always addressed the Assembly with a show of respect, mattered little to them. In striking at him they were striking at the Commune. Threats and insults were now hurled at the Jacobin leader. Cambon rushed towards him and, shaking his fist, shouted:

"You wretch! There, there is the death-warrant of the dictators!"

When Robespierre attempted to reply, a deputy cried:

"A man charged with such a crime should be heard only when standing at the bar of the accused!"

It was a virtual demand for his arrest, and had Louvet brought matters to a close by making a motion to that effect, it might have carried. But an orator is like any other artist. The task matters more to him than the result. Louvet went on with his speech, which he finished rather lamely by asking for the arrest not of Robespierre, but of Marat, and the appointment of a commission to investigate Robespierre's conduct.

A less skilful parliamentarian than Maximilien would have been tempted to make an immediate rejoinder—since he needed no documentation, and since a request for postponement gave the charges factitious importance. But the advantages of postponement far outweighed the disadvantages. He knew that he was usually at his best when he had prepared his speech beforehand. A delay would, furthermore, allow the impression produced by Louvet's oratory to be dissipated, and he would be able to concern himself only with the specific charges. It would enable him also to gauge public opinion and get the organized support of the Jacobins. Last, but not least, he would be holding

the stage alone. So he arose and asked for eight days' time in order to prepare a rejoinder. It was granted, and the 5th of November appointed as the day on which the Convention would hear him.

VIII

The wisdom of his course soon became apparent. Louvet's speech, in the interim, was demolished by the newspapers—not only by the opposition press, but by some of the Gironde organs as well. In cold print the charges appeared so puerile that Gironde editors like Carra, Gorsas and Condorcet were impatient with them. Louvet bitterly complained that he was being abandoned by his friends.

The extent of the public interest in Robespierre's reply may be judged by the fact that a crowd stood all night waiting for the doors of the public gallery to open. In the reserved gallery not a seat remained vacant. The Gironde government thought it necessary to make a great display of armed force, but there was no disorder, although the previous evening *Fédérés* had galloped through the streets calling for Robespierre's head. Everything that day was propitious to him. Guadet was no longer chairman. Hérault de Séchelles, who presided, sympathized with the Mountain and could be relied on to maintain order.

Robespierre was, on this occasion, brief and to the point in replying to the personal charges. If he had really aspired to be a dictator, he said, would it not have been necessary for him to rid himself of the National Assembly as well as of the King? Yet, was it not a fact that he had been the first to demand the convening of the Convention?—Far from having threatened the Legislative Assembly with the tocsin, he had rebuked

the man who had done so. He cited the chairman and several deputies present as witnesses, thus disposing of Louvet's only serious charge. He turned Louvet's accusation that he had arrogantly walked to the executive desk on his first appearance at the Commune to ridicule with the words: "I was far from foreseeing that the day would come when it would be necessary for me to explain to the National Assembly that I went to the executive desk to have my credentials verified". He paid his respects to Roland in the following terms: "Citizens, if, following the example of the Lacedaemonians, we ever erect a temple to fear, I am of the opinion that its priests should be chosen among those who incessantly entertain us with professions of their courage and descriptions of the dangers besetting them". And referring to the Mercandier report: "Oh, virtuous, exclusively and eternally virtuous man, what goal do you hope to attain by such tortuous ways? There may come a day when you will realize how much you owe to the moderation of the man you sought to ruin."

Next he turned his attention to a defence of the Commune, which after the fall of the monarchy had taken various measures—such as making numerous arrests and suppressing all royalist newspapers—which the Gironde termed illegal and arbitrary. He admitted their illegality. They were as illegal, he said, as the storming of the Bastille, as the attack on the Tuileries, as the Revolution and as liberty itself! "Is it with the criminal code in your hand that you should judge the precautions it was necessary to take to ensure public safety during a crisis provoked by the very inadequacy of the law? *Do you expect a Revolution without a revolution?* Who, when once the blow is struck, can mark with precision the point at which the waves of popular

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beginning, and would remain unto the end, characteristic of his spoken and written word.

Nevertheless, his reply to Louvet must be counted among his ablest speeches. It has none of the prolixity and repetition that mar most of the others and is relatively free from rancour. It was statesmanlike in that he carefully refrained from making a counter-attack, evidently striving to appease the situation. When he concluded, the Plain joined the Mountain and the galleries in the applause. Louvet demanded that he be heard in rebuttal, but was shouted down. Barbaroux, after vain attempts to obtain the floor, presented himself at the bar of the accused, so he might be heard, but was only laughed at for his pains. Louvet, coming home that night, said to his wife, Ladoïska: "We had better prepare to go into exile or to mount the scaffold".

CHAPTER NINE

END OF THE KING AND OF THE GIRONDE

I

ON the 13th of November, 1792, the fate of Louis Capet—formerly Louis XVI, King of the French—became the order of business at the Convention. There appeared in the tribune the figure of a man never seen in it before—a commanding figure, tall, slim, erect, distinguished, elegant. A double row of large gold buttons shone brightly on the dark-blue, carefully buttoned coat, from which emerged the broad, frilled bow of an immaculate white stock. Above it was an oval face of uncommon, almost feminine beauty, with finely chiselled, cameo-like features, framed by powdered hair, parted in the centre and descending upon the shoulders. Yet the face did not lack firmness, and the look of the grey-blue eyes, under the perfect arches of the dark eyebrows, was cold and resolute.

Although this was to be his maiden speech in the Convention, the young man did not seem in the least eager or disturbed. There was about him a consciousness of superiority, with a touch of disdain. He started to speak, and almost immediately his hearers knew that a new force was making itself felt among them—not just another able orator, but somebody vitally significant. The young man was Louis Antoine de Saint-Just, twenty-five-year-old friend and protégé of Robespierre, if such a man as he can be said to be anybody's protégé.

When Saint-Just takes the stage the biographer of Robespierre feels for the first time that here is a personality that, but for the accident of Thermidor, might have become more significant than the "Incorruptible", and might, had their wills finally clashed, have proved the stronger. They died friends, but indications are not wanting that Saint-Just was beginning to steer an independent course and that Robespierre knew it and felt aggrieved. Even so it is a question if his influence upon Robespierre was not at least as great as Robespierre's influence on him.

Their acquaintance dated from August, 1790, when Saint-Just wrote to Robespierre, asking him to save the Community of Blérancourt, where he lived, from the ruin threatening it as a result of the proposal to transfer the market—the village's principal source of revenue—to the neighbouring town of Croucy. "I do not know you, but you are a great man", he wrote to his future friend. "You are not only the deputy of a province, but of humanity and the Republic."

He had, like Robespierre, at first sought an outlet for his restless spirit in literature. At twenty he published *Organt*, a long didactic poem in twenty cantos. It was a frank imitation of Voltaire's *La Pucelle*, and contained, like its model, some licentious passages. More characteristic of the author than the poem itself is the preface, assuredly the shortest ever penned: "I am twenty; I have done badly; I could do better".

Formality, red tape, circumlocution of any kind were obnoxious to him. He was the only man in the Convention who used the words *guillotine* and *guillotiner* instead of resorting to euphemisms like "the sword of the law". In one of his reports he writes: "The cabinet is a world of paper. The prolixity of correspondence and instructions is proof of its inertia. It is impossible to

govern without being laconic." He lived and died laconic. In the Convention he spoke only on the most important occasions; at the Jacobin Club, hardly ever; in private life, no more than necessary. In his speeches he used short, cutting sentences, which he accompanied by a movement of the hand that recalled the falling of the blade of the guillotine.

His début at the Convention was characteristic. "His words", says Barère, "were like the blows of an axe." He demanded that the King be put to death without trial, without ceremony and without delay for the crime of having been king—equivalent, he said, to being a despot.

Painlevé has remarked that Germany to-day gives an example of what becomes of a republic when it shows itself too indulgent to those opposed to republican institutions, and Saint-Just said: "Those who make revolutions by halves, but dig their own grave. What constitutes a republic is the destruction of everything opposed to it."

And so, "beautiful, fanatical, dictatorial", he became like a symbolic figure of the young republic itself. Robespierre was the political tactician, the parliamentary strategist, but when the deadly assault had to be made in the Convention, it was Saint-Just who made it. "There is something terrible about the love of the Fatherland", he said during his fierce attack on Danton. "It is so exacting that it sacrifices everything to the public weal, without pity, without fear and without distinction of persons."

It was as an "organizer of victory"—to which title he has as much right as Carnot—that he became principally famous. Here his activity was of a nature to put him in a class with Napoleon—except that it is doubtful whether the latter, under like circumstances, could

have done nearly so well. The armies of the Rhine and the North were in a state of disintegration; the entire French front, in danger of collapse. Through the influence of Robespierre he was appointed commissioner at the front with almost absolute power over two armies and five departments. The whole spirit of the army changed a few days after his arrival. He radiated authority. He arrested, fusilladed, promoted, demoted, issued decrees that from anybody but him would have seemed madly extravagant. Women were exiled from the army; officers and men, ordered to sleep in their tents and without removing their clothes. When soldiers ran away from the enemy, he had cavalry saber them. Regimental commanders were told that if their men retreated they themselves would be shot. Nor did he hesitate to plunge into the thick of battle himself. His crested hat and tricolour sash of office were a terror and an inspiration. Victory followed wherever he went. Wissembourg, Landau, Charleroi, Fleurus were far more his work than that of the military commanders. "When you are with the army, you are the Commander in Chief", Jourdan said to him.

Critics who decry Robespierre speak often with enthusiasm and always with respect of Saint-Just. Michelet stands aghast before him and calls him a "glorious tyrant". Taine sees him as a "living sword". Levasseur says: "Who, while regarding Saint-Just with horror, would dare say: I do not respect him?"

In nothing was Napoleon's star so propitious to him as in removing Saint-Just from his path. That terrible republican would have been a match for the terrible imperialist. Up to the time when he died, Saint-Just gave greater promise than Napoleon, who, no more than he, could have extricated himself from the fatal net of Thermidor.

II

Although the proposal to have the Convention decree the King's execution without trial was introduced by Saint-Just, there can be no doubt that it originated with Robespierre, who in his own speech on the subject presented what were at least serious arguments to justify it. What could have induced Robespierre—who at one time had eloquently defended the abolition of capital punishment and trial by jury with all possible safeguards for the accused—to reverse his judgment so completely? Was he not beginning to tread a new path, upon which he had taken the initial steps when he gave his consent and encouragement to the attack on the Tuileries?

That he was treading a new path is certain, as it is likewise certain that in adventuring upon it he left behind him some of his former ideals. He no longer believed that the Revolution could be carried on along strictly legal lines. *He had been a political reformer, he had become a revolutionist.* He had drawn nearer to Marat's position, and on this occasion even went beyond Marat, who favoured a trial. But it should be likewise kept in mind—a fact which, strangely enough, is frequently left out of the reckoning by his critics—that he was now dealing with an entirely different set of circumstances. A public man may, in times of peace and comparative quiet, oppose capital punishment and favour unrestricted democracy and liberty of the press, yet, in time of war and violent revolution, may take the exact opposite stand. The country was now at war. It had overthrown the head of the government by violent insurrection. It would soon be torn by rebellion. To accuse him of abandoning his principles because he advocated the use of measures which he had con-



ROBESPIERRE

From a contemporary etching

demned when none of these conditions prevailed, is to blame him for not having been an impractical visionary.

That Robespierre was changing is revealed by a study of his portraits. The expression of benevolence, which in the earlier portraits hovers about the corners of his mouth, is, in the later, replaced by one of tenacity and resolution. The eyes, which formerly reflected the smile of the lips, are now truculent. The forehead, which was serene, is puckered into a frown. A study of his speeches and writings reveals an increasing self-centredness. He is still the defender of the poor and oppressed, but now considers himself as peculiarly fitted—almost divinely appointed—for the task; and he will resent with increasing bitterness any doubt concerning this. His respect for the people—his belief that the voice of the people is the Voice of God—has hardened into a dogma, which, in his heart, he no longer believes. What he believes is that “virtue was always in the minority”. It is upon the “enlightened minority” that he will lean more and more, and he will consider it enlightened only in so far as it agrees with him. He still has ideals, but they are subordinated to his one principal ideal of founding the Jacobin Republic. Yet his grasp of affairs will, on many occasions, prove truly statesmanlike, and he will give evidence of really remarkable administrative ability.

To understand his position in regard to the King's execution it should not be lost sight of that Louis' fate was never in doubt. Whatever the outcome of the trial, death was certain. Had Louis been acquitted, he and his family would have been massacred. Had the penalty been less than death, the result would, almost certainly, have been the same. The King himself felt so sure of this that he was uneasy lest the Gironde proposal to submit the sentence to a popular referendum carry,

and massacre would immediately follow. Since he had to die, he preferred a dignified end. During the September massacres a tricolour ribbon stretched across the entrance to the *Temple* had, it is true, sufficed to ensure the safety of the royal family, but that was because the King's death was considered a foregone conclusion anyway and the sense of the requirements of national dignity reserved him a fitter fate. It is difficult for us to understand this bitter hatred of so apparently harmless an individual, but it must be kept in mind that the people of Paris considered themselves doubly betrayed by him: first, to the foreign enemy, and again when on the day of the insurrection they had been allowed to advance into the vestibule, being led to believe that there would be no resistance, and had then been shot down. While Louis was probably not responsible for this, the populace considered him guilty, and the sections were constantly sending delegations to the Convention demanding his execution.

A trial could, therefore, avail the King nothing, but was a serious danger to the State because of the passions it would arouse and the practical certainty of a lynching (involving national disgrace) if the sentence were less than death. Nevertheless, Robespierre's proposal shocks our sense of justice and seems anti-social. It is precisely to prevent such things from happening that society has been organized. It is but fair to Robespierre to assume that he considered all this. He was not actuated by personal animus. It should likewise be kept in mind that his proposal did not differ essentially from the famous decree of *hors la loi*, of which he himself later became the victim. His argument before the Convention did not lack logic, and was at times fraught with sombre eloquence. The following are a few of the most striking paragraphs:

END OF THE KING AND OF THE GIRONDE

"There is no trial to be held here. Louis is not a prisoner at the bar. You are not judges. You are statesmen and representatives of the people, and can be nothing but that. There is no sentence for you to render either for or against a man, but a measure to take vitally affecting the welfare of the State. Louis denounced the people of France as rebels. He called in the foreign despots—his colleagues—to chastise them. Victory and the people have decreed that he is the rebel. Louis cannot be judged, he is already condemned, or the Republic lacks all justification.

"If Louis can be tried, he can be acquitted. He can be pronounced innocent. What do I say?—He is presumed to be innocent until proved guilty. But if Louis is absolved, if Louis can be declared innocent, what becomes of the Revolution? If Louis is innocent, then all the defenders of liberty are defamers, and the royalists, the friends of outraged innocence. In that event Louis' present imprisonment is a crime. The *Fédérés*, the people of Paris, all the patriots of France are the guilty parties.

"The people do not judge as would a court of law. The people do not render sentence, they hurl the thunderbolt. They do not condemn kings, they plunge them into the void."

How completely the revolutionist had taken the place of the political reformer, who had once edited a paper called *The Defender of the Constitution*, and had preferred "The Friends of the Constitution" to "Jacobins" as a name for his favourite society, is shown by the following:

"You invoke the constitution in his behalf? The constitution forbids you to do what you have already done. The constitution condemns you. Go then and implore pardon at the feet of Louis XVI!"

Finally, he had to confront himself and explain why

he, who had once opposed the death penalty, now favoured it. One can well imagine that when writing the lines he was reminded of how once, in Arras, he had nervously paced the floor and for two days had hardly eaten or slept when as Judge of the Ecclesiastical Court he had to affix his signature to the death sentence of a murderer:

"I demanded the abolition of capital punishment in the Constituent Assembly, but you who never dreamt of invoking clemency on behalf of so many unfortunates whose crimes were not so much their own as of the government they were serving, by what process of reasoning do you invoke it now when pleading the cause of the principal culprit?"

"Yes, the death penalty in general is a crime, and for that reason can be justified only in cases where the safety of individuals or of the social organism renders it imperative. Public safety is not imperilled in the case of ordinary crime, since society can always protect itself by other means, and prevent the criminal from becoming harmful. But a dethroned king in the midst of a revolution—neither prison nor exile can make his existence a matter of indifference to the State. Louis must die, because the Fatherland must live!"

III

There was found among Robespierre's papers a note in which he accuses the Girondins of having desired the King's immediate execution fully as much as the Mountain, but having wished to reap whatever benefit could be reaped from apparent opposition. That their stand was deliberately Machiavellian is doubtful; that they were influenced by the fact that their party had become the refuge of the royalists is more than prob-

able. They had no common policy and were obviously hesitant. Brissot and Vergniaud, after making eloquent speeches against the death penalty, both voted for conditional death—*i.e.* postponement of the execution. Others in their camp voted with the Mountain for unconditional death; the majority voted for imprisonment.

The strategy of the Gironde was to introduce numerous diversions. One of these was the proposal to submit the sentence—whatever its nature—to a popular referendum. Robespierre proved his practical spirit by opposing this on the ground that it would tear the country in twain in time of war. Still another diversion was a motion to dissolve the Paris sections. This almost started a riot. The Mountain demanded a roll call. "A roll call or civil war!" cried David. Robespierre rushed to the tribune. Pandemonium broke loose. The Girondins hooted him. The Mountain, on its feet, flung insults at them over the heads of the Plain, and was repaid in kind. Robespierre shouted from the tribune:

"Liberty of speech no longer exists then except for dispensers of calumny and partisan cabinet ministers?"

This was answered with exclamations such as these:

"Impudent scoundrel!"

"He thinks this is the second of September!"

"We are not afraid of your assassins, Robespierre!"

"From the ruins of a shattered throne a monster is risen. May it perish!"

On the side of the Mountain Marat was standing in his seat, swinging his arms and screeching:

"Miserable Roland faction! Shameless rogues! You are betraying the country!"

Barère, in the chair, swung the bell until it flew off the handle. Then he covered himself, while ushers ran about trying to quiet the excited deputies.

Finally, on January 16, 1793, at 8 o'clock in the evening, began the historic thirty-six-hour session that was to decide the fate of Louis XVI. Marie Antoinette had not been accorded the distinction of trial by the Convention, but in October of that year was to be handed over to the Revolutionary Tribunal.

The voting was by roll call, deputy after deputy appearing in the tribune and often making a short statement before voting for imprisonment, conditional or unconditional death. The long barn-like structure was lit by clusters of oil lamps. The boxes in the reserved gallery were filled with a gaily dressed company. Deputies paid visits to those boxes, where ices and oranges were served and score was kept by pricking a calling card with a pin. In the public gallery people had brought baskets of food, and bottles were passed around. Some of the deputies on the floor likewise were partaking of a collation, while, ominously, from the tribune, sounded at intervals the words: "*La mort!*"

It was before this audience that the King's Nemesis—the grim Robespierre—again appeared and said:

"We are the representatives of the people, sent here to cement liberty by condemning a tyrant. I know not how to outrage reason and justice by regarding the life of a despot as more valuable than that of the humblest citizen, nor how to torture my mind to find a subterfuge for shielding a great culprit from a punishment his accomplices have already been made to suffer. I am inflexible towards the oppressors because I have compassion for the oppressed. The same sentiment that prompted me to demand the abolition of capital punishment in the Constituent Assembly, prompts me now to demand that it be inflicted upon the oppressor of my country, and in his person upon the institution

of royalty itself. I vote for death."

The final vote stood 387 for unconditional death, 334 for conditional death or imprisonment, giving a majority of 53 for immediate execution.

On the morning of the 23rd of January, 1793, Eleonore Duplay asked her betrothed why the *portecochère* had been shut. "Because", he replied, "something will pass your father's house to-day that it is better you should not see."

Yet, in his mind's eye, he himself must have seen it—the green, closed carriage, in which sat the King and his confessor, advancing slowly under the sullen sky; the 1500 foot and horse escorting it; the double row of National Guards and *Fédérés* on either side of the street, all the way from the *Temple* to the Place de la Révolution. He must have heard the ominous growl of drums, which began when the procession left the *Temple*, was picked up by drummers stationed at intervals, and did not cease until the King had reached the foot of the scaffold. He must, in his mind's eye, have seen him climb the steep steps and look for the last time over the gardens where he had walked as King, over the people who had been his subjects and were now his executioners. . . . And there must have risen before Robespierre still another scene: a young king with his young queen, sitting in state in the reception hall of the college in the Rue St. Jacques, and he himself, a youth of seventeen, standing before them and reading his Latin eulogy. . . . And when meditating upon all this, perhaps there came to him that premonition of his own fate he seems to have had so often, though he could hardly have suspected that his would be the fate he had meant for Louis: he would be put to death without a trial!

IV

One reason why Danton is more popular with his countrymen than Robespierre is that, in his speeches at least, his attitude was that of a national leader, while in Robespierre the class leader usually betrayed himself. Maximilien, when once in power, did not, however, hesitate to sacrifice class interests when the well-being of the nation was involved, thereby weakening himself somewhat with his staunchest supporters. Not so the Girondins. It was not the fact that things were again going badly at the front and Dumouriez' treason that caused the downfall of the Gironde, but its stubborn resistance to any measure that might affect unfavourably the interests of the bourgeoisie.

As a result of the fall of the assignats prices had risen enormously, and there was great discontent among the workers, whose wages had not been raised in proportion. In February, 1793, there had been looting of grocery shops in Paris. To stop the foreign invasion a forced draft had to be decreed, which resulted in armed rebellion in the Vendée. Money was needed to fight the hornets' nest the Gironde had been principally responsible for stirring up (England, Holland, Spain and Sardinia had been added to France's enemies), and taxes were virtually uncollectable. What did the Gironde do to meet this critical situation? In the words of Michelet: "It did nothing and would not let anybody else do anything".

For the justifiable complaints of the workers it had no remedy except bayonets and violent abuse. It did little or nothing to meet the growing danger in the Vendée, claiming—contrary to all reason—that the uprising had been started by Paris "anarchists". It championed the royalists by resisting the sale of the

land of the *émigrés*: practically the only resource the country had left. When the measure passed over its opposition, the Gironde functionaries in the provinces did everything to hinder its execution. It opposed a forced loan, but had no plan of its own for replenishing the empty treasury. It hindered recruiting by writing letters to the provinces in which the commissioners of the Convention (chosen mostly from the Mountain), sent to organize the draft, were called anarchists. It opposed the establishment of a Revolutionary Tribunal, the formation of a Committee of Public Safety, army reform—anything and everything that could and did save France from foreign invasion and chaos.

The Gironde's energies were absorbed in its fight against Robespierre, Marat and the Commune. It managed to have Marat arrested, but the Revolutionary Tribunal acquitted him, and his partisans carried him in triumph back to the Convention. Finally, understanding that the key to the situation was control of the sections, it set out to capture them.

It has been explained that the sections were organizations resembling New England town-hall meetings. Citizens of all classes, living in a certain quarter of the city, would meet in the section, listen to public speakers and discuss matters relating to municipal and national government. It was the delegates of the sections who had ousted the old Commune from office and had formed the Insurrectionary Commune that had overthrown the monarchy. It is interesting to note that while the Mountain accused the Gironde of wishing to establish a federated republic, in order to protect the provinces from legislation forced from the Convention by the Paris radicals, the Mountain's chief supporter, the Commune, was itself a federation of little republics, for that is what the sections really were. They showed

considerable independence. Both the Commune and the Convention would be forced to woo them.

What gave the Gironde courage for the undertaking was the situation in Lyon, where the Girondins, aided by the royalists, had wrested control of the sections from Chalier and his Jacobins. To Pétion was assigned the task of firing the opening gun in the campaign. Robespierre's former friend, now his enemy, thus addressed the Paris bourgeoisie in an open letter:

"Your property is in danger! The have-nots are being incited against the haves. Will you do nothing to prevent it? The well-to-do and peacefully-inclined are leaving Paris. Paris is perishing before your eyes and you do not bestir yourselves! Five or six hundred men—for the most part without any known means of subsistence—lay down the law to you and exercise the most unbearable despotism over 600,000 citizens."

In addition to the appeal, the Committee of Twelve—at that time the most powerful committee of the Convention and wholly composed of Girondins—issued a number of orders intended to cripple the hold of the Fourth Estate upon the sections. It ordered meetings of the sections to close promptly at ten, which would have made it impossible for working-men to be present, except towards the close of the meeting. It ordered the membership registers turned over to it, which meant systematic persecution of the radicals, and forbade members of one section to attend the meetings of any other section. This last was intended to break up a habit the Robespierrists had of invading the bourgeois sections and seizing control by main force.

It is not to be imagined that Robespierre remained idle throughout all this. He stigmatized the bourgeois as *Culottes dorées* and told his followers: "You have aristocrats in your sections. Throw them out!" Then,

lest the battle degenerate entirely into a fight between the haves and the have-nots, he added as an after-thought: "Do not judge men by their fortune and social position, but by their character. There are only two classes: the friends of liberty and equality—the defenders of the poor and oppressed; and the abettors of injustice and ill-gotten wealth—the tyrannical aristocrats." He, furthermore, made the proposal that working-men who attended the meetings of the sections, or were called for service on the National Guard, be reimbursed for the time lost from their work. The measure, which eventually passed, had a double significance. He undoubtedly meant it not only as a means of combating the bourgeoisie, but likewise the extremists in his own ranks—the *Enragés* and Hébertists. Extremists, being zealots, would attend meetings when others would not, hence were able to gain control of many of the sections, which was not to his liking. A broader attendance threatened their control. They knew this so well that, later, they sent a committee to the Convention to protest against the measure. Robespierre replied that he saw no reason why men of limited means, who gave their time to the public cause, should not be remunerated, the same as he.

The Gironde campaign to gain control of the sections failed utterly. The working-men had gained too much political experience. They were in control of most of the offices in the sections and had the municipality on their side. One reason why in Italy and Germany the Fascists were able to overcome the Communists and Socialists was that the authorities were in sympathy with the Fascists. A Communist arrested during a riot with arms on his person would get a month in jail; a Fascist, for the same offence, would get a week with reprieve. The time was to come when

Fréron's *Jeunesse dorée* would be able to break Jacobins' heads with impunity. But that time was not yet. Now *Culottes dorées* were sent to jail for smashing chairs over the heads of *Enragés*. The Committee of Twelve retaliated by arresting Hébert, Varlet and a few others. When a delegation from the Commune came to the Convention to protest, the Girondin Isnard, who presided, thus addressed it with savage eloquence: "If as a result of these recurring insurrections the National Representative Body is ever humiliated, I declare unto you in the name of all France that Paris will be annihilated! People will come to search on the banks of the Seine to see if such a city has ever been!"

V

Obviously this sort of thing could not go on in time of war without leading the nation to its ruin. Either the Gironde or the Mountain and the Commune would have to be eliminated as a factor in the government. Since the Commune had an armed force at its disposal and the Gironde had not (the *Fédérés* had long ago gone over to the Jacobins), it would have to be the Gironde; and since the Girondins, with the aid of the Plain, still controlled the Convention, any action against them would have to be insurrectionary.

Of all the insurrectionary movements during the Revolution that which accomplished the arrest of the Gironde leaders was by far the best organized and managed. No detail seems to have been overlooked. Letters passing through the Paris post office were stamped "Revolution of May 31". The time that would be required to complete the action seems to have been nicely figured: the Commune was asked to make provision for three days' pay for each man under arms.

The revolutionary machine contrived to carry out the project was highly ingenious. It was designed to shield the really important leaders and permit all the others to shift responsibility in case of miscarriage. At the head of the National Guard was placed Hanriot, at that time an almost unknown man. He was to receive his orders from a Revolutionary Committee (likewise composed of men of little importance), which, in its turn, was supposed to be obeying a delegate meeting of the sections at the bishop's palace. Since the co-operation of the Commune was indispensable, the following scheme was devised to relieve the councilmen from responsibility: the Revolutionary Committee dissolved the Commune and immediately reinstated it again, invested with a revolutionary mandate! To complicate matters still further, and probably to neutralize the influence of the *Enragés* on the Revolutionary Committee, a meeting of elected officials of the Department was called at the Jacobin Club, which appointed enough new members to that Committee to outvote the extremists. Cumber-some as this organization appears on the surface, it was, says Pariset, excellently devised both for victorious advance and for retreat in case of a check. It managed to accomplish all it set out to accomplish without the loss of a single life.

Everything points to Robespierre as the originator, organizer and director of the movement. On this occasion he proved that he could be a man of action after all—peculiarly Robespierrist action. The long and careful preparation, the attention to detail, the attempt to make an obviously illegal act conform to legality, the care not to expose himself or any other leader, the ingenious organization, the overwhelming force used—all are peculiarly his. We need not, however, confine ourselves to hypothesis regarding his role. The Gironde

historian Dulaure speaks of a secret committee holding its meetings at Charenton, a suburb of Paris, as the actual directing head. He names as members of the committee Robespierre, Danton, Marat, Pache and Chaumette. That Danton and Marat were members is belied by their conduct; that such a committee existed and Robespierre was its leader appears certain. Garat—at that time Minister of the Interior—likewise mentions the committee and says that he made efforts to find its meeting-place. Cambon speaks of it in a speech he delivered after Thermidor.

The Girondins themselves seem to have been perfectly aware that it was Robespierre, and none other, who was responsible for their downfall. Louvet, replying in his memoirs to the charge that the Girondins had instigated Marat's assassination, says: "If she [Charlotte Corday] had consulted us, would it have been against Marat that we would have directed her blow?" Vergniaud, during the trial of the Girondins, said to Desfieux: "Ah, my friend, if we had wanted to ruin anybody, it would have been Robespierre".

VI

The decision to use force against the Convention marks an important turning-point in Robespierre's career. He had always respected—almost revered—the National Assembly, at least in principle. His sentiment towards it was bound up with his spiritual existence. It was this reverence that was probably responsible for one of the greatest mistakes of his career: his failure to dissolve the Legislative Assembly after the fall of the monarchy. During the Constituent he had rebuked Desmoulins for attributing to him a facetious remark at the expense of the National Assembly, and at an-

other time had indignantly protested against the arrest by local authorities of a member of the Right. His utterances immediately before and after the insurrection betray his inner struggle. He flares up at the Commune, which at one time seems to have wavered: "If the Commune fails to make common cause with the people, if it fails to form a compact alliance with it, then it violates its most fundamental duty and is unworthy of the popularity it has hitherto enjoyed". But he himself feels lassitude coming over him, and says at the Club: "I am unable to prescribe to the people what measures it should take to save itself. It is beyond the power of any one man to do so. It is not for me to do so, exhausted as I am by four years of revolutionary activity, consumed as I am by a slow fever. There is at present nothing more that I can do." Meeting Garat on the street he says to him: "I am tired of the Revolution. I am ill. The country has never been in a worse predicament. I doubt if it can extricate itself." Ten days after the fall of the Girondins, far from sounding a paean of triumph, he again says at the Club: "As for me, I confess that I realize my inadequacy. I have no longer the necessary stamina to combat the machinations of aristocracy. Exhausted by four years of painful and bootless struggle, I feel that my physical and mental powers are no longer equal to the requirements of a great revolutionary movement, and it is my intention to resign."

But in spite of this doubt and self-torment he went on. On the 26th of May all was ready and he gave the signal at the Club: "I declare myself in a state of insurrection against the corrupt deputies. I ask all the deputies of the Mountain to rally to the combat."

The Jacobins arose and declared themselves solemnly in a state of insurrection.

VII

On the 10th of May, 1793, the Convention had moved to the Machinery Hall of the Tuileries, transformed into a meeting-place for the National Assembly. The hall was sumptuous in a baroque manner. There was plenty of room for the spectators, fifteen hundred of whom could be seated comfortably, while twice that number could, if necessary, be accommodated. The deputies, however, were crowded. The proximity made their quarrels more personal, venomous and intense. They shouted into one another's faces, read the hatred in one another's eyes.

3 On the 31st of May the deputies assembled at six in the morning, having been awakened by the clamour of bells. There were many futile gestures, many meaningless speeches. Who had ordered the tocsin tolled? To what purpose? But it was tolling, and the haggard-looking Gironde leaders, most of whom had spent the night away from home for fear of arrest, were powerless to stop it. And towards noon there was the sudden boom of the great cannon on the Pont-Neuf. To fire the cannon without an order from the Convention was punishable with death, but the cannon had been fired, and there was nothing the Convention could do about it.

The bells kept up their maddening medley of sound, and at intervals the cannon boomed ominously. Delegations began arriving in seemingly endless succession, all, in language more or less threatening, demanding the dissolution of the Committee of Twelve and the arrest of the Gironde leaders. All this while the galleries, packed to suffocation, kept up a constant turmoil and the petitioners on the floor demonstrated noisily. The resistance of the Plain was beginning to

weaken. Barère appeared in the tribune and on behalf of the Committee of Public Safety proposed that the Committee of Twelve be dissolved, but that the armed force of the city be placed under the authority of the Convention. The proposal was greeted with hoots and groans. Vergniaud thereupon called upon the deputies to leave the hall in a body, since it had been taken possession of by the mob. He himself started towards the exit, expecting his colleagues to follow. They remained seated, and he turned back somewhat sheepishly.

Robespierre took the floor.

"Your Committee of Public Safety has made various proposals. I adopt one: the dissolution of the Committee of Twelve." As for giving the Convention control over the military force of the city: "There are men here who would punish this insurrection. It would be absurd to give them the power to do so. But are the measures your committee proposed the only ones it is necessary to take? You must purge the army; you must . . ."

"Conclude!" shouted Vergniaud.

Robespierre turned on him savagely.

"Yes, I will conclude, and against you! Against you, who wanted to send to the scaffold those responsible for the revolution of the 10th of August! Against you, who have never ceased your incitements against Paris! Against you, who conspired with Dumouriez! Against you, who wished to save the life of the despot! Against you, whose crimes have called forth the protests which you now seek to impute as a crime to your victims! My conclusion is to demand the indictment of all the accomplices of Dumouriez and of all those named by the petitioners."

Vergniaud paled under the onslaught. He did not

reply. But the Right and the Plain refused to be intimidated. The arrest of the Gironde leaders was not voted. Robespierre had to play his final card.

VIII

"The Commander of the National Guard will surround the Convention with a formidable body of troops, so that if it fails to accede to the just demands of the Paris citizenry, the leaders of the [Gironde] faction may be taken into custody in the course of the day."

This order was delivered to Commander Hanriot in the "wee small hours" of the 2nd of June, 1793. Hanriot, who had been clerk at the city barriers and battalion commander, was a big, blustering fellow with a sepulchral voice and a *tic* keeping his facial muscles in motion for a few seconds whenever he finished speaking, the reflexes culminating in three winks of one eye. Soon staff officers and couriers were sent galloping, and in section after section drums began to growl and men dressed in the blue uniform of the National Guard began forming into regiments and battalions. There was no hysterical scream of tocsins, only the sullen roll of the drums, the crisp commands of officers, and the quiet tolling of church bells calling the faithful to prayer, for it was Sunday. The women, if they did not go to Mass, stood on their doorsteps or leaned out of windows "to see the revolution pass by". The men felt in fine fettle, for the morning was azure and gold and they were being paid two francs a day for the trouble of playing soldier.

Some authorities claim that there were 100,000 men under arms; others speak of 20,000 to 30,000. There was cavalry and there was artillery. Even a regiment of German mercenaries that happened to be handy was

pressed into service. Detachments of soldiers were placed in front of the prisons to prevent a repetition of the September massacres, and then Hanriot led his army towards the Tuileries. Long before noon, the Convention, which had assembled at ten that morning, was securely bottled. Cannon were levelled at the building. Deputies arriving late were escorted into the hall by two sentries. Those trying to leave were stopped. One who attempted to force his way through only succeeded in getting his clothes torn.

It was a humiliating situation for an Assembly whose predecessors had defied a king and had challenged the rulers of the earth. Danton and several others voiced their indignation. Delacroix made a motion that Hanriot be ordered to withdraw. The motion carried amidst protests from the galleries, and Barère mounted the tribune and proposed that the Convention march out in a body and deliver the order to Hanriot. "Then", he says in his memoirs, "Robespierre stepped up behind me and said in a low voice: 'What are you doing? You are making a fine mess of things!'"—whereupon it dawned upon me what role that hypocrite had been playing in all this without daring to come out into the open."

Barère's motion likewise carried, and all but Robespierre, Marat and some thirty others filed out behind the president, Héault de Séchelles.

Robespierre knew that the recalcitrants must soon return. Hanriot would not withdraw and would not let them pass. That day the long, bitter struggle between him and Brissot would come to an end. He knew that the responsibility would then be his and might well have been appalled by the enormity of that responsibility. That very day message after message had reached the Convention, each with the news of some

fresh danger or disaster: The English fleet, before Dunkirk! An army trapped at Mayence! Another, compelled to retreat in the Midi! Valenciennes, besieged! Fontenay, captured by the revolting peasants! Rebellion in Lyon! Savoy, turning against France! . . . He must have known that any man taking responsibility at such a time must prepare himself for the worst, and that failure and death, rather than success and triumph, might be expected. The fact that he had the courage to assume responsibility, proved himself, in a large measure, equal to the task, and that by the sheer force of his personality he was able to dominate the situation for a whole year in the face of almost unprecedented difficulties, gives him, in spite of his mistakes, some claim to greatness.

IX

Sad and humiliated the deputies filed back into their seats. Robespierre's friend Couthon greeted them with the following words, the irony of which may have been unintentional:

"You are now undoubtedly convinced that you are free. You have met the people and have found them kind, generous, reasonable in every respect. I do not yet ask for an indictment, only that the twenty-two, the members of the Committee of Twelve, and the cabinet ministers Clavière and Lebrun, be placed under guard at their homes."

Barère came to consult Robespierre regarding Danton's proposal that hostages be given to the Gironde Departments. Danton himself generously offered to go as a hostage to Bordeaux. Robespierre rejected it: "It is nothing but a trap", he said. Other compromise proposals were likewise rejected, and it was finally voted that twenty-nine Gironde leaders and

the two cabinet ministers be placed under domiciliary arrest. They were so badly guarded that twelve subsequently managed to escape.

Few men can, in their maturity, demolish their gods with their own hands and set up others as worthy to whom they can be loyal. Robespierre was not such a man. He was to remain a skilful parliamentarian, and was to become a forceful governor and able administrator, but was to grow increasingly nervous, bitter, suspicious, intolerant, ego-centric, and at times terrifying. In serving his country and the Revolution, he destroyed himself. During the last few months of his career there is evidence of mental and physical breakdown. Even had Thermidor resulted in a victory, Robespierre would soon have cracked. Saint-Just said to him once: "Calm yourself, the phlegmatic carry off the victory". It is quite probable that the defeat of the Thermidorians would, in the end, not have been a victory for Robespierre, but for the phlegmatic Saint-Just. He had not worn himself out, as had his friend, and was by temperament better fitted to withstand the strain.

X

The epilogue to Robespierre's struggle with the Gironde was played in October of that year, when the Gironde leaders were turned over to the Revolutionary Tribunal. The armed rebellion they and their escaped colleagues had fostered in time of war sealed their fate. Garat tried to intercede with Robespierre on their behalf and gives an account of his interview with him in his memoirs. He suggested the creation of a special tribunal to try the Girondins, receiving the curt reply: "The Revolutionary Tribunal is good enough for them". He then asked if there were any objection to

his acting as their unofficial counsel.

"They would have had a good laugh if they heard you. If they had had a chance they would have had you very unofficially executed", Robespierre said ironically.

"I think they would have done little beheading", Garat remonstrated, and was answered with the enigmatic: "Little is right!"

Still another appeal made to Robespierre elicited the following reply:

"Do not speak of it again. I cannot save them. There are periods during revolutions when to live is a crime, and when men must know how to surrender their heads when demanded. And mine, too, will perhaps be required of me. (He made a movement as if he were going to lift his head from his shoulders.) You will see if I will flinch!"

Robespierre could not have saved the Girondins. He had great difficulty protecting their remaining colleagues in the Convention from the fury of the extremists. Whether he would have done so had it lain in his power is problematical. He probably would have saved some, but not all.

On the 31st of October, 1793, "the big children of the Revolution" went singing to the guillotine. Brissot did not sing. He was wrapped in sombre thought.

PART III

CHAPTER TEN

POWER

I

AFTER the 10th of August, 1792, Robespierre had become unofficial Mayor of Paris; after the 2nd of June, 1793, he became the unofficial Ruler of France. What was the nature and extent of his power? Was he a dictator? Is Michelet right when he says concerning him: "All the powers of government being concentrated in the hands of one man, that man found himself absolute, dreaded, more than Louis XIV, more than Bonaparte. At one time he ascends higher than the throne, he is placed upon an altar"?

The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* defines a dictator as being, in modern parlance, "a ruler having extra-constitutional power". Larousse's definition is: "One who unites in his own person all the powers of government, whether attributed to him by law or usurped by him". Neither definition fits Robespierre, hence Michelet's sweeping and romantic statement likewise must be discarded. Yet Robespierre's power was very great, so great, in fact, that at times it appears dictatorial since it paralysed all opposition as effectively as if it had been absolute.

He did not become a member of the reorganized Committee of Public Safety until July 27, 1793, but began shaping the policies of the government immedi-

ately after the fall of the Girondins. His private notebook—perhaps the most valuable document we have of his—proves him to have been the veritable head of the government. He busied himself with the direction of every State function, not the least (in spite of Carnot's statement to the contrary) with the conduct of the war and the management of the army. Abroad he was regarded as the head of the French nation to such an extent that the Duke of York, reporting to his government the situation on the battle front, speaks of "Robespierre's soldiers". His imprint upon public life in France was sufficiently great to draw from Restif de la Bretonne a lament about "this Puritan, this Robespierist age".

Officially, however, his power was no greater than that of any other member of the Committee of Public Safety. The majority of that Committee and the Committee of General Security—which together governed France—was, as a matter of fact, opposed to him. On the first, he could count, beside himself, on the support of only two out of the twelve members—Saint-Just and Couthon; on the second, on two out of eleven—Lebas and David. His proposals in the Committee of Public Safety were often rejected, his opponents glancing at one another and nodding in token of understanding. There often were bitter quarrels, which grew at times so heated that it was necessary to move the sessions from the ground floor to the first floor of the Pavillon de Flore, to avoid public scandal. Yet, when he made up his mind to drive through a policy, he usually managed to override all opposition as effectively as if he had been an absolute monarch.

What enabled him to do this?

The force before which the Committees and the Convention sometimes reluctantly had to bend was his

prestige—the magic of his name and reputation—his influence with the Jacobins, the Commune, the people of Paris and of France. For he had become wellnigh a symbol. Perhaps not until recent years has there been such spontaneous adulation of a public man. Children were named after him in profusion. Letters he received from individuals and organizations are full of the most extravagant terms of admiration and devotion. He is called “Founder of the Republic”, “Scourge of tyrants”, “Father of Patriotism”, “Beacon, Column, Keystone of the Republic of France”! One correspondent assures him that he would rather see every drop of his own blood spilled than permit Robespierre’s honour to be called into question in the slightest degree. Still another sees him as a Messiah. Not all such protestations appear to have been insincere, as such protestations usually are: several people who committed suicide when news of Robespierre’s death reached them, did so not because they themselves had anything to fear, but from sorrow and despair at the collapse of all which, in their eyes, he represented.

This popularity—like a cloud fraught with lightning at the command of his gesture—menaced and awed his opponents. But he and they knew that he dared not summon forth the lightning except as a last resort; that he dared not even threaten them with it too often, lest the threat lose its force. It had to remain potential. Once it smote, nobody could foretell the consequences. Knowing this, they opposed him on most minor and some major matters, partly, no doubt, from resentment at his unauthorized supremacy.

Barras, in his memoirs, gives two interesting glimpses of this fear of Robespierre’s prestige. The first is an account of a stormy session of the Committee of Public Safety, during which Collot d’Herbois so far

forgot himself as to lay violent hands on Robespierre. The latter was about to leave the room, and was with his colleagues that he would denounce them publicly. They immediately begged him to become reconciled and rebuked Collot, who humbly apologized. Even more characteristic is the account Barras gives of his own and Fréron's visit to Robespierre, after the latter had had them recalled from the Midi. The ruthless consuls, who had toyed with the destiny of thousands, stood before the one-time provincial lawyer as men and a pair of wayward schoolboys before an angry headmaster. They started to address him as *tu*—the informal form of address at that time—but believing they noted signs of displeasure at such familiarity, changed immediately to *vous*, "so as to conciliate this easily susceptible and haughty personage". They flattered him and humbled themselves before him, but "the face of a statue or of a corpse could hardly be equalled the inscrutability of his features".

What must have made their humiliation and that of others especially poignant was that he was their supposed equal. Had Robespierre been the official rather than the unofficial Ruler of France, he would have had fewer deadly enemies. It was the very essence of power that he tasted, but essence is sometimes a volatile substance.

II

The first six months of Robespierre's reign were almost entirely to his credit. It is no exaggeration to say that he preserved the unity of France. When the Girondins were placed under arrest, the leading governmental agency—the Committee of Public Safety—was dominated by Danton and Barère. However divided opinions may be about Danton, there is no

tical unanimity concerning Barère. He was an exceedingly able barrister without any fixed principles, who carefully watched which side in a controversy was likely to be victorious, and at the moment of victory was found almost invariably on the winning side. He had been first a royalist, next a Feuillant, was now a leader of the Plain, and would ultimately side with the ultra-terrorists.

Danton and Barère had vacillated throughout the crisis. After the insurrection both were ready to surrender the fruits of victory by negotiating with the Gironde Departments, and again spoke of giving them hostages—a practical recognition of federalism. Robespierre opposed all such proposals. He demanded unconditional recognition of the authority of the central government: the Convention and the Committee of Public Safety. To quiet the fears of the Gironde Departments regarding the Mountain's intentions, he rushed through a new constitution.

The constitution of 1793 was a compromise document. Realizing that the unity of the country was at stake, he was willing to make concessions. So Condorcet's draft was used as a basis and he acquiesced to the omission of the definition of the limited rights of private property, appearing in his own draft. The omission was a wise one, for the Girondins undoubtedly would have made use of the definition to prove to the country that the institution of private property was in imminent danger. But, on the other hand, the right of wage workers to demand employment—and failing to obtain it, support from the State for themselves and their families—was, for the first time in history, given constitutional recognition.

When the document was put to a standing vote, the Right remained seated. One of Robespierre's followers

demanded a roll call—a dangerous record in the hands of heresy hunters. Robespierre intervened, saying that he preferred to remain under the impression that the gentlemen had not risen because stricken with paralysis.

He had, however, no intention of having the Mountain give up its virtual dictatorship as long as the war lasted. The constitution was submitted to a popular referendum, carried overwhelmingly, and then shelved until the conclusion of peace.

III

A revolution may be defined as a more or less rapid, and usually extra-legal adjustment of the political structure of a State to conform to a changed or changing economic structure. It involves the passing of political power not merely from the hands of one set of men into those of another set of men, but from one social class to another social class. During every such revolution there is a persistent drift towards the Left, followed usually by a certain amount of reaction preceding stabilization.

During the French Revolution, Robespierre and Marat had for a long time represented the boundary line of radicalism. Marat—more extreme in language and tactics, though probably less so in his conception of the ultimate goal—appeared the more radical, though the Girondins well knew that he was by far the less dangerous of the two. Nevertheless, Camille Desmoulins, somewhat deceived by appearances, wrote: "Beyond Marat, there is to be found what cartographers used to put on their maps to indicate unexplored territory—*terra incognita*".

More even than by Robespierre, the Girondins had been frightened by the shapes they saw stirring in

this *terra incognita*. They had heard the cry for the "agrarian law" coming from those ill-defined regions and felt little reassured by Robespierre's statement that it should not be taken seriously. As the Revolution progressed, the shapes became more sharply defined, and the cries more articulate. There emerged the *Enragés* and Hébertists, and their leaders, Roux, Varlet, Leclerc, Rose Lacombe, Hébert. To them Robespierre and Marat were conservatives. "Monsieur Robespierre", said Rose Lacombe, and curled up her lip contemptuously.

Now Marat was no more. On the 13th of July, 1793, Charlotte Corday's knife cut short his tormented existence and created a temporary revolutionary saint. Perhaps the tired Robespierre envied him a little when he said at the Club: "I foresee that the honours of the poniard are likewise reserved for me and that chance alone determined who would be first. My end, too, is fast approaching." Marat, as much as Robespierre, had fought the *Enragés*, devoting once a whole number of his paper to an attack on Roux. Now Robespierre had to face the difficult task alone. He who once had upbraided the Constitutionalists for wishing to set limits to the Revolution, now himself was forced to call a halt.

Who were the *Enragés* and what was their programme?

Their movement was born of the difficult situation the working classes found themselves in as a result of the fall in the value of the assignats. It grew tremendously in the autumn of 1793, owing to the dry summer—which caused millponds to run dry and stopped mills from grinding, causing a shortage of flour—and to the uprising in the Vendée, which cut off a large part of the meat supply. Their principal leader was a priest,

severely, though faithful to his usual method he had refused to acknowledge that the people were to blame, and had thrown the responsibility upon royalists in disguise and agents of the enemy. He was, furthermore, not a believer in the efficacy of price fixing. He thought it would result in an even greater shortage of commodities. He later ascribed the shortage during the terrible winter of 1793-4 largely to that cause. Whether or not he was right is debatable. It may be that the extraordinary situation produced by war and civil war made the General Maximum unavoidable. The severity of the Terror was, however, largely due to the necessity of enforcing the Maximum.

Roux' proposal of a government monopoly of distribution was likewise urged upon Robespierre by his friend Buissart. To what extent Robespierre favoured it we do not know. He defended the merchants, but this may have been a tactical move. He understood what the *Enragés* never seemed to have been able to realize, that the working class of France was not sufficiently strong to remain unaided in control of the government. Hence he made a bid for the support of the lower middle class—the small shopkeepers and property owners.

The other leaders of the *Enragés*—Varlet, Leclerc, Rose Lacombe—are of considerably less importance than Roux. Varlet was a postal clerk of barely twenty who gained notoriety principally as a street corner orator. On his oratorical expeditions he trailed behind him a little wheeled platform, which served him as a rostrum. A pamphlet written by him shows a considerable confusion of ideas.

Leclerc received the following compliment from Marat: "Varlet is perhaps nothing but a brainless plotter, but the little Leclerc is a very able rascal". Leclerc demonstrated his ability by starting, after

Marat's death, a paper called, in imitation of Marat's, *The People's Friend*, which he claimed to be edited by "The Shade of Marat". Marat's widow, upon Robespierre's suggestion, publicly protested against this.

Rose Lacombe, an actress, was Leclerc's mistress. She had taken part in the march of the women to Versailles and had for some time been imprisoned for doing so. She organized a revolutionary women's club. One day she and her followers invaded the Halles to force the women there (many of whom were royalists) to don the red cap. The *dames de la Halle* stopped long enough from their bargaining to administer a spanking to the enthusiasts. Her club was dissolved by the Convention. The revolutionaries—including Robespierre—had, for all their radicalism, old-fashioned ideas about woman's place in the scheme of things.

Most important was Hébert, leader of the Hébertists. He was as insincere as Roux was sincere: a blatant demagogue with a shady past who exploited the tragic situation of the country for his own private ends. At the beginning of the Revolution he had been a royalist and had denounced the radicals with gusto, expecting, no doubt, some of the golden manna that had flowed so profusely from the royal treasury. He soon became aware of the danger of such a course and veered around to the opposite extreme. He established a paper called *Father Duchesne*, which for coarseness of language and violence of class appeal surpassed anything printed during the Revolution. Since the style is the man, it may not be without interest to quote a sample:

"The Austrian tigress [Marie Antoinette] was regarded by all the courts of Europe as the most degraded prostitute in France. She was openly charged with wallowing in the mire with her lackeys, and it would be difficult to determine which one is the author of the

deformed and gangrened abortions that issued from her womb."

Contrary to what might have been expected, Hébert was a handsome, soft-spoken, well-groomed sybarite, not devoid of a certain personal charm. He had no economic programme of his own, but after having helped to dispose of Roux, whom he thought a dangerous competitor, adopted the latter's. His political programme included such demands as war to the bitter end, immediate application of the new constitution, dissolution of the Convention and new elections, abolition of the Committee of Public Safety, a Revolutionary Army to travel about the country with the guillotine and make requisitions, and heads, heads, heads! The head of Marie Antoinette, the head of Madame Elisabeth, the heads of the Girondins (including many of those still remaining in the Convention), the heads of the monopolists, the heads of the profiteers, the heads of the speculators, the heads of the royalists! But instead of putting, like Roux, his faith in street riots, he proceeded, by a judicious use of the political influence his paper had given him, to fill the government offices—especially the War Office—with his henchmen. This had the double advantage of giving him a grip upon the government and enabling him to make an honest penny by negotiating war contracts.

Robespierre despised him, but made use of him against Roux. Revolutions, said Saint-Just, are not made with rose water. Not unlikely Maximilien had Hébert in mind when on the 8th of Thermidor he said that, at times, he had feared being defiled by the unclean presence of some of the men with whom he was forced to deal.

IV

When Robespierre joined the Committee of Public Safety the situation was at its worst. Defence lines were crumbling in the North, dissolving on the Rhine. Condé surrendered to the enemy, so did Mayence, so did Valenciennes. Landau and Cambrai were in imminent danger. The situation in the interior was as bad, or worse. Of the eighty-four Departments sixty-two were in revolt. Disaster followed disaster in the Vendée. Lyon—the second city in the country—was taking the lead in the rebellion, and its forces were about to form a junction with those of Nîmes and Marseilles. In Paris, the royalists were lifting their heads again, and a serious plot was discovered to free the Queen and the Dauphin.

To extricate the nation from such a predicament seemed wellnigh a hopeless task. But the frontier Departments remained loyal, the rebellious areas were nowhere contiguous, and widespread as was the rebellion, it had taken no deep root among the populace. So the Committee was making headway. The Calvados, Bordeaux and Marseilles were subdued; Lyon was besieged. But the economic situation was getting steadily worse, and then, suddenly, there came the news that Toulon, with its squadron of forty-eight war vessels, had been voluntarily surrendered to the English by the royalist command.

Hébert now thought that his opportunity had come. His agents had for some time been stirring up the suburbs. On the 4th of September, 1793, a huge crowd gathered before the City Hall. The Mayor (Pache) and the Procurator (Chaumette), realizing that they were about to become revolutionary wreckage, as had so many others before them, avoided personal disaster by placing themselves at the head of the malcontents.

Hébert addressed the crowd, giving it the following advice:

"To-morrow let the people flock to the Convention. Let them surround the National Assembly as they did on the 31st of May, and let them not abandon their post until that body has adopted all the measures necessary for our salvation."

What grim irony there is in the successive waves of revolution! Once the Girondins had besieged the King in the Tuileries. Less than a year later they themselves were besieged by Robespierre. And now Robespierre was to undergo the same fate! He appeared that night at the Club, where the Committee of Public Safety—especially Barère—was violently attacked. He defended Barère and the Committee. He threw the blame for the disorders upon *intrigants* and public enemies. "The scoundrels would, if they could, massacre the Convention, the Jacobins. They try to alienate the people from us by attributing to us all the ills from which it suffers."

How the Lameths, Duport, Barnave, Brissot, Vergniaud, Louvet would have enjoyed the spectacle! How they would have enjoyed seeing the fierce Jacobin leader standing at bay before the very forces he had nurtured, and who were now turning upon their apologist and trainer! But having cracked the whip, he held out this morsel to the angry beast:

"If the rich farmers persist in sucking the people's blood, we will turn them over to the people itself. If we find too many obstacles in dealing out justice to the traitors, the conspirators, the profiteers, then we will have the people deal with them."

There are reputations revolutionaries dare not attack, for fear their followers may lose faith in the revolution itself. The Hébertists might manhandle Danton and

Barère, but, as yet, they left Robespierre alone. He was the ark. Royer, who replied to him, said: "Robespierre, your heart is pure, hence you believe that those with whom you associate are like you".

The next day, Hébert's programme was carried out. It was the old story. Galleries jammed to suffocation. All available space on the floor packed with noisy demonstrators. A huge crowd surrounding the building. Robespierre presided. Chaumette, who headed a delegation, addressed him:

"No more quarter! No more mercy for traitors! If we do not get rid of them, they will get rid of us. Let us throw between them and us the barrier of eternity."

It was a demand for the Terror. Robespierre remained non-committal: "Liberty will survive all intrigue and conspiracy. The Convention is alive to the ills affecting the people."

Motion follows motion. A delegation from the Jacobin Club, carrying their banner with the watchful eye and the device "Liberty or Death!" has arrived. Its spokesman demands that "Terror be made the order of the day".

"Terror the order of the day!" Discontent has found its slogan. Danton moves that the Revolutionary Tribunal be divided into sufficient sections so that every day at least one head might fall. Barère has scented the new turn of the wind and intones:

"Yes, let us make Terror the order of the day! The royalists want blood? Very well, they shall have it! We will give them the blood of their own—of the conspirators, of Brissot, of Marie Antoinette! They want to destroy the Convention? Miscreants, the Convention will destroy you! You wanted to make the Mountain perish? Very well, the Mountain will crush you!"

Robespierre is no longer in the chair; either from

weariness, or for some other reason, he has called Danton's friend Thuriot to come and take his place.

v

The consequences of the Hébertist and *Enragé* offensive of September 5, 1793, were very considerable and greatly affected Robespierre's fortunes. Apparently the malcontents got most of what they wanted. The Law of Suspects was passed: Terror became the order of the day. The General Maximum was adopted, and the legislation called into being to guarantee its enforcement was exceedingly severe. A merchant could be punished with death for failing to display outside his shop a list of the kind and quantity of commodities he carried. A Revolutionary Army was created, which went about the country spreading terror. Two Hébertists—Billaud-Varenne and Collot d'Herbois—had already been added to the Committee of Public Safety.

To what extent did Robespierre believe in these measures, to what extent were they forced upon him?

He believed in the necessity of the Terror, and even without the Hébertist offensive would, eventually, have had it adopted. "The most fundamental law", he said, "is the public weal. I have always maintained that a people striving for liberty must be inexorable towards those conspiring against it; that in matters of that kind it is cruel to be weak and criminal to be indulgent, and that the requirements of humanity alone command relentless justice."

The letter to the Communes, upon whom devolved the task of enforcing the Terror, was written by him, and tends to indicate that he wished to have it applied

with moderation as well as justice. The epistle is characterized by a certain nobility of expression:

"The greater the power entrusted to you, the more severe must the accounting be. To draw back before that which public welfare requires of you were weakness—to go beyond it is fanaticism. The revolutionary law has placed the power in your hands to avenge public wrong, and by that very fact forbids you to avenge private grievance. Forget that you are private citizens, remember that you are judges. Unaffected by passion—your own or that of others—merit by your conduct the right to punish crime."

To what extent he must be held responsible for the later exaggeration will be treated in a succeeding chapter. For the present, suffice it to say that, considering the gravity of the situation, the Reign of Terror during the French Revolution does not, on the whole, appear to have been more sanguinary (and was perhaps even less so) than similar measures taken during national crises far less severe. The author holds no brief for Collot d'Herbois and Fouché, but when one compares the 1667 lives snuffed out by them in Lyon with the 17,000 disposed of by Thiers and his aids after the Paris Commune, one wonders whether the cruelty of the "Fusilladers of Lyon" has been exaggerated, or whether Thiers has been treated with unmerited indulgence.

What has made the Reign of Terror under the French Revolution particularly memorable is its dramatic quality, and, undoubtedly, likewise the fact that it was directed against the privileged classes and their supporters, and that many famous names figure upon the roll of its victims. There is more sorrow in the historical camp about a Marie Antoinette than about a thousand nameless wretches, whose defence, nevertheless, would permit the building of a far stronger case.

The Committee of Public Safety has itself largely to blame for much of the deserved as well as undeserved criticism by making the executions a public spectacle and thereby dramatizing them for posterity. As to the influence of this upon the populace, it could hardly have helped being debasing, and the daily association with death, far from acting as a deterrent, made death lose its frightening mask. The Committee should have remembered Voltaire's saying: "Nothing is more disagreeable than to be hung in obscurity".

It is difficult to understand why Robespierre—granting that the extraordinary situation compelled him to reverse his judgment concerning the death penalty—did not object to these demoralizing exhibitions. In his speech against capital punishment in the Constituent he had used the argument that it "brutalizes and hardens the people's mind". Could he not see that such was the effect of the public executions? Could he not see that they were a grave psychological blunder? The answer probably is that executions had always been public and that it was not easy to break with tradition. But he had broken with many traditions. He showed in this matter either an amazing want of vision or a remarkable lack of forceful initiative.

The Revolutionary Army—comparable to a similar force existing in the Russia of our day—can likewise not be said to have been forced upon him. He believed in it, at least for a time. Later he became convinced that it was a danger to the State, and had it abolished.

The principal policy the Hébertists and *Enragés* forced upon him was the General Maximum. The prices of 1790 were taken as a basis, and the price of each commodity figured by adding one-third to the price then prevailing. But it would have been impossible to fix prices without likewise fixing wages. Owing to the

fact that over a million men were in the army and industry was greatly stimulated by the demands of the War Office, the workmen would have been in a position to keep forcing up the wage scale, thus playing havoc with the legal scale of prices. Wages were fixed at the 1790 level, plus not one-third, but one-half. The standard of living of the working classes was, therefore, officially set at about 15 per cent above what it had been three years before.

As time went on, the workmen, realizing that but for the legal standard of wages they would be able to get more (although failing to realize that prices would immediately rise in proportion), became dissatisfied. There were labour disturbances, in which the municipality was forced to take the side of the employers, who were paying the legal scale. In one case at least the Le Chapelier Law, forbidding labour combines, was invoked. Thus, owing to the necessity of balancing himself between two classes when no longer merely a class but a national leader, Robespierre injured himself somewhat with his staunchest supporters. Mathiez is of the opinion that his fall must be largely attributed to this circumstance. The author, however, can find no evidence that the workmen actually deserted him. Mathiez himself admits that on the 9th of Thermidor nearly all the sections of Paris sent contingents to the City Hall. While angry with the Commune, the workmen responded, nevertheless, when they realized that Robespierre was in danger.

Yet, Hébert's victory was, properly speaking, not a victory at all. What Hébert had principally wanted was power, and Robespierre, by yielding on the Maximum, foiled his ambition. Hébert, who had hoped to become Minister of the Interior, failed to get the appointment, and the Committee of Public Safety, far from abdicat-

ing, took a firmer hold on the ministerial offices, including the war office. As for Roux, having asked for the Terror, he saw it applied to himself and his followers. He eventually committed suicide in jail.

The two Hébertists Billaud-Varenne and Collot d'Herbois, who had become members of the Committee of Public Safety, belonged to Hébert's camp only in the sense that they believed in an exaggerated use of the Terror and in some other measures he favoured. They in no way recognized him as their leader. Billaud-Varenne was a teacher and author. He was devoid of charity and blinded by personal ambition, but, on the whole, true to his principles and ready to suffer for them. Collot d'Herbois was an actor and playwright. He was a vain and violent man with a taste for strong drink. He possessed courage and ability, but his name is for ever sullied by the cruelties he perpetrated in Lyon.

VI

Robespierre's government had hardly recovered from the attack launched by Hébert, when it had to sustain another launched by Danton.

After the insurrection of the 2nd of June, Danton had found himself seriously compromised. He had been a member of the Committee of Public Safety—the Danton Committee—elected soon after Dumouriez' treason. When after the fall of the Girondins that committee was reorganized, Danton was dropped. His revolutionary ardour had been called into question at the Jacobin and Cordelier Clubs. Strange rumours were abroad regarding the source of his prosperity. Doubt had been cast in open Convention upon his personal honesty. He sulked and went into eclipse. But he was hardly the man to remain in that state indefinitely. On

the 24th and 25th of September he made a drive for power.

The moment was propitious. The *Enragés* and Hébertists were dissatisfied with their Pyrrhic victory of a few weeks before. Danton, on that occasion, had made a bid for their support by proposing the multiplication of the Revolutionary Tribunal. It pleased them sufficiently to make them acknowledge that he had "a revolutionary head", and they would, had he desired it, have forced his election to the Committee of Public Safety. But he had no wish to play a secondary role in a Robespierre government: he preferred to head one of his own.

There were other malcontents. The Commissioners of the Convention to Mayence and Valenciennes—Merlin de Thionville and Briez—who had surrendered those cities to the enemy, had been received by the Committee so cavalierly as to be filled with resentment. Some former members of the Committee of General Security, whom the Committee had forced to resign, likewise harboured a grudge. All these and their friends added to the Dantonists and to the Right, could, it appeared, easily command a majority and overthrow the government. Besides, Robespierre had been indisposed for several days and compelled to keep his bed, so that his redoubtable presence in the tribune would not have to be reckoned with. In this last, however, the forces allied against the Committee were disappointed. When informed that the government was about to suffer crushing defeat, Robespierre got out of bed and in truly Napoleonic fashion put his enemies to rout.

There was on the Committee a single Dantonist—Thuriot. He resigned, giving as a reason the Committee's treatment of Houchard, who had won the

battle of Hondschoote, but had been arrested for not following up the victory. Robespierre was mainly responsible for the Committee's summary manner of dealing with its generals. For fear that laxity on the part of a general might be due to treason, he took it for granted that it was treason, and acted accordingly. A general had to be not only like Caesar's wife—above suspicion—but like Caesar himself: invincible. If he suffered defeat he might as well prepare to mount the scaffold. Whatever might be said about the justice of such a policy, there is no denying its effectiveness: it produced victories.

It is, however, exceedingly doubtful if indignation about the Committee's treatment of Houchard induced Thuriot to resign. It appears far more probable that his resignation was part of the strategy of the occasion. It was but natural that a staunch Dantonist like Thuriot should resign from a committee the Dantonists set out to overthrow. Moreover, by joining the attackers on the floor, Thuriot could and did give them valuable aid. He undoubtedly expected to be a member of the new Danton Committee intended to take the place of the wrecked Robespierre government.

The assault began on the 24th. Danton himself remained in the background, while his forces deployed. The Committee's field of action was so vast that it was not difficult to find weak spots. One could take this or that regrettable incident, magnify it, paint it in blackest colours, make it appear representative, and hold it up to scorn. This was the strategy adopted. But it was on the 25th that the Committee's enemies really went into action. Speaker followed speaker. Accusation succeeded accusation. Goupilleau, Duhem, Briez, Merlin de Thionville, Delaunay assailed the Committee. It had mismanaged the campaign in the Vendée. It had allowed

the supply service to break down. It was incompetent. It was arbitrary. Briez spoke so eloquently that they elected him then and there to the Committee that had scorned him—an invitation to it to resign. The Committee's defence was weak. Billaud-Varenne, Jean-Bon Saint-André, Barère—members of the Committee—had spoken without effect. Barère's speech was apologetic and appears to have been intended to prepare his entry into the new government. Yet apology was hardly required. One might with justice have charged the Committee with undue severity, but hardly with incompetence and laxity, the principal accusations made by the Committee's enemies. It is to-day conceded that seldom, if ever, did men prove themselves more equal to an almost superhuman task, or expended themselves more unstintingly for a public cause. The historian Louis Cambon thus describes their activity:

“How did this government succeed in accomplishing so colossal an amount of work? By never resting. Its members did without sleep, without regular meals. Often a piece of bread, eaten at the desk, had to suffice to restore their burned-up energy. It is difficult to understand when they slept at all, for their activity appears uninterrupted. In the morning they would meet and discuss the business on hand. Later, they would go to the Convention, where the secretary and usually one or two others would be called upon to take the floor. Then, work in their offices—correspondence, orders. In the evening, another meeting, which often lasted until morning.”

It is therefore hardly surprising that Robespierre seethed with indignation as he took the floor to defend his government.

“This day”, he said, “has been worth three victories to Pitt. If we are fools, traitors, what are you who have

elected us? You accuse us of doing nothing? Eleven armies to direct. The weight of all Europe to carry. Traitors to unmask. Emissaries bought with enemy gold to thwart. Disloyal officials to supervise. Tyrants to combat. Conspirators to intimidate. Endless obstacles to overcome. That is our task!"

He did not defend: he attacked.

"From accusers, you will become the accused!"

He singled out some of the Committee's detractors, leaving only tattered shreds of reputation. Seldom had he been more effective. His enemies were cowed; the Convention, awed. Then he risked the final test by flinging the government's resignation into the face of the Convention:

"The country is lost if the government does not possess your unlimited confidence and is not composed of men who merit it. I demand the renewal of the Committee!"

Jaurès, discussing the relative merits of the revolutionary leaders, says: "Great as were Cambon and Carnot, they were administrators, not governors. They were the effect; Robespierre, a cause."

This is what the Convention likewise must have felt when it heard the resignation. It must have sensed that in that supremely difficult hour the stern ascetic in the tribune was the only man capable of rallying the nation's forces so they could be hurled as one man against the enemy. He had no sooner flung his challenge than the deputies were on their feet shouting: "No! No! No!"

Briez, awed, now made his apology. He had not intended, he said, to accuse the Committee, and since Robespierre had presented the Committee's resignation because of his (Briez') election, he asked to be allowed to withdraw. Somebody made a motion that his elec-

tion be rescinded, which was promptly done. Robespierre closed the incident with words that have become famous:

"I say unto you that he who was at Valenciennes when the enemy entered at the gates does not belong on the Committee of Public Safety. He can never give the right answer to this question: *Are you dead?*

"I say unto you that if I had been in Valenciennes at the time the enemy entered, I would not be here to render a report. I would have shared the fate of those who preferred death to base surrender."

Barère, realizing that the situation was saved, now picked up his courage and asked that the government be given a vote of confidence. "What have we come to", he said, "if Robespierre has to justify himself before the Mountain?" So they gave the Committee a vote of confidence—unanimously! Billaud-Varenne asked that all the Committee's acts be approved, and the poor, beaten Parliament did that also. It likewise decided that henceforth the commissioners were not to report to the Convention, but to the Committee, which it made supreme over all other committees, though not sufficiently so over the Committee of General Security.

The dictatorship of the "Great" Committee dates from the 25th of September, 1793. Until the fall of Robespierre its composition was to undergo no further changes, except for the elimination of one member—Hérault de Séchelles. It was now composed of the following: Robespierre, Saint-Just, Couthon, Carnot, Lindet, Prieur (of the Marne), Prieur (of the Côte d'Or), Jean-Bon Saint-André, Barère, Billaud-Varenne, Collet d'Herbois, Hérault de Séchelles.

Immediately after this memorable parliamentary battle, Robespierre had to take to his bed again, while Danton asked and obtained a leave of absence and went

to Arcis-sur-Aube. It appears not unlikely that he did so in order to distract attention from himself.

VII

Never until recent years has such regimentation of all the material and spiritual forces of a nation been attempted as now took place in France under the iron rule of the Revolutionary Government. The credit for this largely belongs to Robespierre. In this as in some other matters he proved himself the mentor of Napoleon. Let us examine the powerful dictatorial machine that was able to crush all internal opposition, rally the forces of the nation for decisive victories over the armies of all Europe, and forge the weapons which, while meant for defence, were ultimately used for conquest.

The supreme power was the Committee of Public Safety—the "Great" Committee. It received its mandate from the Convention, which, it is true, could dissolve or renew it, but the Convention was overawed by Robespierre's presence on the Committee. It had not forgotten the 2nd of June. An agent of the Committee was placed in every Department. He had authority to make requisitions and to depose, replace or imprison the regularly elected officials. Replacements were made from lists furnished by the local Jacobin Clubs. All public officials were, therefore, under the authority of the Committee.

The Committee of General Security—the "Little" Committee—was likewise chosen by the Convention, but from names presented by the "Great" Committee. Under its orders worked the local Revolutionary Committees, which made arrests. The Committee of General Security decided which of the suspects should

be brought to trial. The Revolutionary Army, the Terror, the printing press were the weapons of the two Committees. When a situation needed special attention, a Commissioner of the Convention—a Proconsul—was sent, with almost absolute power, but responsible to the “Great” Committee.

Highly efficient as was this governmental machine, it was not without friction. There was friction on the “Great” Committee. There was friction between the Committee of Public Safety and the Committee of General Security. The local Revolutionary Committees sometimes proved unmanageable, and even Collot d’Herbois complained about their “irresponsible fury”. Some of the proconsuls were guilty of unpardonable acts. But, notwithstanding all this, marvels of organization and administration were accomplished. Order was restored throughout the country. The Vendée was subdued. Fourteen armies, totalling 1,200,000 men, were raised, trained and equipped. The productive forces of the nation were stimulated to an unprecedented degree. Great victories were won. It is regrettable that historians, by over-emphasizing the Terror, have distracted attention from the truly remarkable executive and administrative work of the Committee.

Robespierre’s private note-book, before mentioned, shows the important role he played in all this. He busied himself with the appointment and dismissal of proconsuls and generals, the disposition of the armies and the supply service, foreign relations, pensions, the postal service, the preservation of public order, propaganda, etc. Not even such details as that the bronzing of gun-barrels covers up defects of manufacture escaped him.

Was this dictatorship merely a war organism, or did it have revolutionary significance? In a document

found among Robespierre's papers, written before the organization of the Revolutionary Government, we read the following: "There must be one will, and one only. It must be either royalist or republican. If it is to be republican, there must be republican ministers, republican newspapers, republican deputies, a republican government." It is obvious, therefore, that he meant to use the Revolutionary Government in order to establish the Republic firmly. But it was a Jacobin Republic he wished to found—in which not bourgeois, but proletarian influence predominated, for we read in the same document: "The danger within comes from the bourgeoisie. The *sans-culottes* must be kept in the cities and paid a daily stipend. They must be roused to anger, armed, enlightened. Enthusiasm for the Republic must be fostered by every possible means."

What he therefore contemplated does not differ essentially from what in modern parlance is known as a "dictatorship of the proletariat".

But, as he looked at his colleagues of the Mountain, he seemed to have had serious doubts about the sincerity of their affection for the Fourth Estate. In a curious catechism, likewise found among his papers, and written after the fall of the Gironde, appears the following, which he crossed out, as if realizing that his thoughts had strayed into a passage without an issue, where lurked paralysing dejection and discouragement:

"The people . . . What other obstacle is there to the people's enlightenment?"

"Poverty."

"When will the people know the truth?"

"When they have bread, and when the rich and the government have ceased subsidizing venal pens and tongues to mislead them—when the interests of the rich

and those of the government are identical with the people's interests."

"When will that be?"

"NEVER."

VIII

When the Gironde leaders were arrested, seventy-five of their colleagues in the Convention had signed a public protest. Hébert, in issue after issue of his paper, demanded that the signers be turned over to the Revolutionary Tribunal, together with their leaders. Under prevailing circumstances this could mean but one thing—death! Hébert knew this so well that he advised the executioner—Samson—to grease the pulleys of the guillotine in preparation for this wholesale butchery.

On the 3rd of October, 1793, the Committee of General Security was to make its report about the Girondins. Nobody doubted what its conclusions would be regarding the leaders under arrest, but there was a great deal of suspense concerning its decision about the signers of the petition. Robespierre was acquainted with the report, which involved no immediate danger for the signatories, but he must have feared that the deputies would be stampeded by the extremists, for he appeared in the Convention that day for the first time since his great parliamentary victory.

Amar, of the Committee of General Security, read the report. The Gironde leaders, as expected, were to be brought to trial immediately. As for the signers of the petition, the committee recommended that they be placed under provisional arrest until a special report concerning them could be prepared. Of the thousands provisionally arrested only a small percentage was ever tried. The report was, therefore, not to the liking of

the extremists, but a motion for its adoption was put and carried.

But now, a Dantonist—Osselin—arose and moved that the part dealing with the signatories be reconsidered, and they be tried together with their leaders. The galleries broke into applause; the Convention sat awed. All realized that if Osselin's motion carried, the seventy-five had only a few more weeks to live. Robespierre arose and walked to the tribune.

Historians who follow the Thermidorian tradition speak of his sinister aspect, of the panther-like manner in which he looked at his victims through his green-tinted spectacles. We do not know how he looked at men he wished to save, but it is not difficult to imagine the tension with which the imperilled Girondins looked at him. Life and death were in his hand. He had but to side with Osselin and all would be over.

"Citizens," he said, "take notice that among those who served the cause of treasonable ambition are many who have been misled. . . ."

A murmur from the extremists on the floor and in the gallery. He looked up at the gallery, always so loyal to him, and went on:

"I speak in the presence of the people, and I tell you this: only those who have the courage to tell you the truth when their private interest commands them to do otherwise are worthy to be your leaders. I maintain that it is beneath the dignity of the Convention to occupy itself with any except the leaders already under arrest. If others are subsequently proved guilty, you are there and can demand that justice be done. I repeat: among those whose arrest is demanded are many men of good faith, many who, I know, affixed their signatures under misapprehension. . . ."

The Girondins were saved. Letters written by them

testify to the fact that they realized they owed their lives to his intervention. His enemies have claimed that he intervened for purely political reasons—to assure himself of the support of the Right—but the moderation of his Lyon policy, a short time later, in opposition to the expressed wishes of the Convention, removes any doubt regarding his motives.

Dubois-Crancé was besieging Lyon, but was doing more negotiating than fighting. When, finally, he decided to act, he bombarded the city, causing great property damage and the death of many non-combatants.

Robespierre, jealous regarding the authority of the central government, was opposed to negotiating with rebels and disapproved of the bombardment. The city, he said, should be taken by storm. Since Dubois-Crancé—a Dantonist—was not inclined to listen to him, he secured the appointment of his friend Couthon for the task of raising an army in the Auvergne and carrying out his project.

Couthon was a mild-mannered man, paralysed in both legs. At the Carnavalet can be seen the wheel-chair in which he used to propel himself about. But he was capable of great resolution, and his physical handicap seems to have acted as a spur to his energy. He raised the army, and took the city by storm.

Following his inclination and Robespierre's instructions, Couthon dealt mercifully with the inhabitants. He was far more concerned about feeding the city than about punishing it. Dissatisfaction with this policy soon developed in Paris, and the Convention passed a decree ordering the city's partial destruction. But Couthon, supported by Robespierre, did little or nothing to carry out the decree. He had himself carried to the principal square of the city, where the mansions of the wealthy

burghers were located, and tapping each aristocratic façade with a little silver hammer, said solemnly: "The Law condemns you!" When this symbolic destruction of Lyon still found no favour in Paris and the pressure became too great, he resigned. Collot d'Herbois and Fouché were appointed to take his place and began their series of fusillades, which, if less deadly than those of Thiers in Paris some seventy-eight years later, were carried out with greater barbarity. Souberbielle relates that when Robespierre was told the details he exclaimed: "Blood! Always blood! The scoundrels! They'll finish by drowning the Republic in it!"

Collot wrote repeatedly to Robespierre, trying to obtain his moral support. He got no reply. Robespierre, however, wrote to one of the Lyon judges, taking him severely to task. Collot, uneasy, then returned to Paris to defend himself, and Robespierre managed to get Fouché recalled. Charlotte tells of a stormy interview between Fouché and her brother. Robespierre did all the storming, while Fouché "grew pale, trembled and stammered a few excuses".

But while he might pale and tremble, Fouché was a far more redoubtable enemy than Collot. He thought, and not without reason, that Robespierre meant to make an example of him, and decided to strike first. He was an opponent such as Maximilien had never had. Brissot, for all his ability at intrigue, was not afraid to fight in the open, but Fouché never exposed himself. When Robespierre would strike, Fouché would vanish, only to reappear as soon as his back was turned. He laid traps and mined the ground his opponent trod. Fouché brought down Robespierre as rats have been known to cause the collapse of a building.

IX

What was in the meantime Robespierre's private existence? Duplay's youngest daughter gives us a glimpse of it in her memoirs. If there be truth in the saying that a man is known by the company he keeps, then the friendship of the Duplays should be counted in Robespierre's favour. The cabinetmaker was a man of exceptional honesty. He had been doing a great deal of work for the government, which after Robespierre's death paid him in worthless assignats. Rather than treat his own creditors in the same manner, he sold his property and paid them in specie, leaving himself little or nothing. He served as juror on the Revolutionary Tribunal, a task he very much disliked and usually managed to shirk. One day when Maximilien asked him what he had been doing on the tribunal, Duplay replied: "I don't ask you what you are doing on the Committee of Public Safety". Robespierre was not offended, but smiled and pressed his hand.

Maximilien seems to have fitted easily and naturally into the Duplay family circle. The parents sought his advice on family matters, the children treated him as an elder brother and came to him with their confidences. He sometimes acted as intermediary between parents and children. He went for walks with the family in the Champs-Élysées, followed by his dog, Brount. Sometimes they dined at a restaurant kept by a Swiss at the entrance to the Tuileries gardens. Occasionally, on a week-end, they would go to the country—to the forest of Versailles or Issy.

His principal visitors were Desmoulins, Saint-Just, Couthon, Lebas, David, Buonarroti and Madame de Châlabe. Merlin de Thionville and Legendre had at one time been among the callers, but their visits had ceased.

David is too well known to require much comment. Besides being a famous artist, he was a member of the Committee of General Security and a great admirer of Maximilien. He was among those who denied him after his death, but he later repented, saying there would come a time when history would do Robespierre justice in the most far-reaching fashion.

Buonarroti—a great-grand-nephew of Michelangelo—was an Italian littérateur and radical. He was one of the few of Robespierre's personal friends who remained loyal to his memory. He later became implicated in Babeuf's Conspiracy of the Equals.

Madame de Chalabre was a woman of noble birth of about forty. She became an admirer of Robespierre while he was still a member of the Constituent, and they exchanged a great many letters. Later, she moved into a house adjoining that of the Duplays and became a daily visitor. If her feelings for Robespierre were other than Platonic, her letters do not show it. She was imprisoned after his death, and her friendship did not prove equal to the severe test.

Those above mentioned—with the exception of Desmoulins, who only called occasionally—would usually meet one evening a week at the Duplays. Buonarroti would play on the harpsichord, Lebas would sing. Sometimes they took a play of Racine or Corneille, and, each having been assigned a role, would read it together. Robespierre and Lebas put most fervour into their reading. When Robespierre would be alone with the family in the evening, he sometimes read to them from Voltaire or Rousseau.

He received innumerable letters, many of which praised him in extravagant terms. A few anonymous epistles excoriated him. Some begged for favours, others for mercy. A few were written in the hope of

compromising him. Such bore on the envelope the inscription that the letter was not to be opened except by Robespierre personally, in the hope that this would induce some inquisitive postal clerk to open it. One such letter speaks of a treasure Robespierre was supposed to be amassing in Switzerland. There is a letter written by a wealthy young widow from Nantes, in which she confesses her passion for him and offers him her hand and fortune. "Thou art my god. I know no other gods but thee", she writes, although it would appear that she had never met him.

Many would attempt to see him, but he was too busy to be easily accessible. A certain Madame de Trémont, who was a countess, managed to gain admittance and gives us a picture of him, seated at his desk, dressed in the height of fashion, coldly polite. A decree had been passed forbidding former nobles to reside in Paris until conclusion of peace, and Madame de Trémont, having opened a shop, came to ask permission to remain. She had called on Barère, who was the proper official to see, but had been curtly dismissed. Robespierre asked if her shop was not a blind, but she assured him that it was not, that she had to depend upon it for the support of herself and her little daughter, whom she had brought with her. He glanced at the child, considered for a moment, and then gave her a note to Barère. She was struck by the change in Barère's conduct after he had read the note from his supposed equal.

Condorcet and others have commented on the fascination his strange, lonely, ascetic figure exercised upon women. In the cell at the Conciergerie, where with shattered jaw he spent several agonized hours, the visitor will find a withered bouquet. On the anniversary of his death an unknown woman comes, takes away the withered flowers and deposits a fresh flowery tribute.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

BETWEEN HÉBERTISTS AND DANTONISTS

I

EVERY revolutionary government has to contend, in its own camp, with two opposite tendencies—the “citras” and the “ultras”: those who accuse it of going too far, and those who blame it for not going far enough. During the French Revolution Danton came to symbolize the first tendency, Hébert, the second. Curiously, however, the two factions interlocked at numerous points to such an extent that it is sometimes difficult to tell whether a man is a Hébertist or a Dantonist. Thus historians have quarrelled about how to classify Hérault de Séchelles. “They understand each other like brigands in a forest”, Robespierre said of the two factions, believing (not wholly without reason) that both were financed by the foreign enemy. His battles with both in September had been by no means conclusive. A month later, the Hébertists—aided by Dantonists like Thuriot—started giving him further trouble, this time on the religious issue.

Catholicism, Robespierre realized, was too deeply rooted in the hearts of the French peasants—at that time three-fourths of the population of France—to be treated lightly. A conflict with the Church had been inevitable, since the latter was one of the principal strongholds of the old régime, but when assailing the Church Robespierre had always distinguished between the Catholic faith and the Church’s servants. Moreover,

in the beginning, he made a further distinction between the prelates and the lower clergy.

It should be considered that the prelates were, without exception, nobles. They were liberally, even extravagantly paid, arrogant, contemptuous of the people, and often irreligious. It has been said that a court prelate would have considered himself disgraced if the rumour were to spread that he was devout. The priests, on the other hand, sprang from the people, were intimately acquainted with their hardships and grievances, and often wretchedly underpaid. Robespierre thought that it should be possible to kindle in them enthusiasm for the Revolution, and with their aid capture the Church, liberalize, modernize and democratize it.

As the Revolution progressed, he began to understand that this plan was doomed to failure. Nearly all of the prelates and most of the lower clergy remained hostile to the Revolution. They bore a heavy responsibility for the uprising in the Vendée and encouraged rebellion in Lyon, Marseilles, Toulon, Brittany and elsewhere. Although the country was fighting for its very existence (a division of France, as Poland had been divided, did not appear impossible at one time) they urged the peasants to refuse to pay taxes. Robespierre became, as a consequence, increasingly bitter towards priests and prelates alike. On one occasion we find him saying: "What connection is there between the priesthood and God? Priests are to morality what quacks are to medicine. The sceptre and the incense pot have conspired to dishonour Heaven and to usurp the earth." But he still continued to make a distinction between the Catholic faith and its clergy. He was unwilling to furnish the opposition with a dangerous weapon against the Republic and did not want the people's attention distracted from the principal to a subordinate issue.

"Is it true that religious fanaticism is the main cause of our difficulties?" he asked Hébert. "By giving it all our attention, do we not lose sight of the real dangers besetting us?"

Before bursting into flame in Paris, the anti-religious intolerance smouldered in the provinces, fanned by pro-consuls like Dumont, to whom Robespierre wrote: "Guard yourself against furnishing counter-revolutionary hypocrites, anxious to start a civil war, a pretext that would appear to justify their calumnies". He had previously written to the patriotic societies: "Take care not to furnish weapons to fanaticism by substituting violence for instruction. Steep yourselves in this truth: conscience cannot be compelled." But now Hébert, ready to take up any issue that promised to be popular, started the propaganda in Paris. It was like touching a match to highly inflammable material. Within a few weeks the Commune, the Jacobins, the sections, a good part of the Convention were swept off their feet. Among Hébert's most active supporters was Anacharsis Cloots.

Cloots furnishes an example of what damage a generous-hearted idealist can do if he possesses ability and energy, but lacks judgment. In the name of human brotherhood he had given Brissot aid and comfort in starting a European war, in the name of freedom of conscience he now aided Hébert in starting what (but for Robespierre) might have become a religious war. He went to see the Bishop of Paris (Gobel) and intimidated that worthy into consenting to appear before the Convention, accompanied by all his vicars, and resigning his office, as tending to promote superstition. The Convention (likewise intimidated, for Gobel was accompanied by Commune officials), instead of accepting the resignation with dignified contempt, did so

with a hypocritical show of respect.

Cloots, proud of his achievement, appeared that night before the Committee of Public Safety, undoubtedly with the intention of urging its policy upon it. He had no sooner stepped into the hall than he found he had made a mistake. Robespierre's practical spirit dominated the Committee. The atmosphere was decidedly frigid. Maximilien looked at him through his green-tinted spectacles and said sharply:

"You told us recently that we should invade Holland and restore independence to the Dutch. Is it in preparation of that campaign that you are now trying to alienate the Belgians from us by shocking their religious prejudices?"

"Oh," replied Cloots, "that can't make any difference. Haven't our enemies been saying all along that we are opposed to religion?"

"Yes, but they did not have any facts, now they have!" snapped Robespierre. Cloots, who had expected quite a different reception, paled and retreated.

Three days later, on November 10, 1793, took place the famous Feast of Reason. Under the lofty Gothic arches of Notre-Dame rose a plaster of Paris Greek temple, bearing the inscription: To Philosophy. The doors of the temple opened, and out came the Goddess of Reason, dressed in azure and white. It was Madame Momoro, who, says Carlyle, made a fine-looking goddess, except that her teeth were a trifle decayed. Her attendants—damsels from the opera chorus—chanted a hymn, after which a procession was formed that wound its way to the Convention hall. Here the goddess descended from the throne upon which she was being carried, received a fraternal kiss from the chairman and the secretaries, and seated herself at the

executive desk. An eyewitness reports that Robespierre got up and left the hall.

The Feast of Reason at Notre-Dame, under the auspices of the Commune, had been conducted with a show of decorum, but now the spectacle was repeated in various other parts of the city and took on a bacchanalian aspect. Public women, decked with religious vestments stolen from the sacristies, danced behind the float of the goddess, arm-in-arm with representatives of the people. Sacred vessels filled with intoxicants passed from hand to hand. Bonfires of holy relics, crosses and other church paraphernalia flamed in the streets. Around these the multitude danced, singing the *Carmagnole*. Unbelievable as it may seem, priests took part in these saturnalia.

On the 17th of November, the Commune passed a decree closing all churches in Paris to public worship. A priest who had the temerity to demand the use of a church for religious purposes could be punished with death! Cloots was elected President of the Jacobin Club. Then Robespierre thought it time to intervene.

II

The situation required tact as well as firmness and courage. He now had no armed force at his disposal. The National Guard was under the orders of the Commune, where ruled Hébert's ally, Chaumette. The Commander of the Revolutionary Army (Ronsin) was a Hébertist. Practically the only weapon remaining to Robespierre was his great moral prestige.

He appeared at the Club on the evening of the 21st of November. Cloots presided; Hébert had the floor. It had come to his hearing, said Hébert, that Robespierre meant to denounce him, Chaumette and even

Pache. He did not believe the rumour, he said. Then he demanded the heads of Madame Elisabeth and the seventy-five Girondins under provisional arrest. Momoro—husband of the goddess—said there was cause to tremble as long as a single priest remained in existence. Then Robespierre took the floor.

One cannot read his speech without admiring his political skill. He has been reproached for his contemptuous reference to Madame Elisabeth. But while he referred to her contemptuously, he pointed out that her death could be of no possible benefit to the State. Unfortunately the tactic proved powerless to save her, yet it was probably the only one he could have used with some hope of success. Foremost in his mind, however, was the religious issue. He knew that as yet he could not be rid of Hébert and Chaumette. So, while condemning their propaganda, he yet left them an avenue of escape.

"The Convention", he said, "has not proscribed the Catholic religion. The Convention will never do so. Priests have been denounced for saying Mass. They will say it much longer if you try to stop them. Those who would hinder them are more fanatical than they."

But he did not lay the blame for the Paris disorders at the door of Hébert and Chaumette. Those disorders, he said, had been fomented by foreign agents who had insinuated themselves into patriotic societies, where they were deceiving many excellent citizens. He demanded that the Jacobins purge themselves of such characters by publicly examining each and every member. His proposal carried, and Cloots, against whom he personally took the floor, was ultimately expelled. His speech against Cloots is hardly to his credit. Whatever Cloots' shortcomings, he was not a

foreign agent, and it is difficult to imagine that Robespierre seriously believed he was.

Hébert and Chaumette scurried for cover. The first announced that he was not an atheist, proclaimed the Gospels an excellent book, and said he considered the "*sans-culotte*" Christ one of the founders of the Jacobin Club. As for Chaumette, he now repeated Robespierre's argument that superstitious people were ill people, and that abuse was not a cure. The anti-religious disorders ceased in Paris as if by magic. As, on September 25, Robespierre's prestige had tamed the Convention, so now it tamed Paris and the Jacobins.

III

Danton was a far more able man than Hébert. He played his cards so well that Robespierre for a long time did not suspect him, but considered Fabre d'Églantine the leader of what Danton's friend and admirer Garat frankly calls Danton's conspiracy against the government.

A strange figure, Danton! Somebody—perhaps Louis Blanc—has compared him with an etching by Rembrandt (full of lights and shadows), and Robespierre with one by Dürer (all on the same plane). He was a man of violent passions, a lover of life. He has been called "the people's Mirabeau" and resembled Mirabeau in many particulars. There is something primitive and elemental about him, something of a natural force. Although a lawyer, he was comparatively uneducated and never was known to set pen to paper except to sign his name. The violence of his impulses may be judged by the fact that when his wife died while he was in Belgium, he had, on his return, her body dug up so he might look on her face again.

Yet, six weeks later, we find him marrying a sixteen-year-old girl and professing belief in Catholicism in order to do so.

He was equally inconsistent in his policies. Of his responsibility in the massacres there can be no doubt, yet we now find him going to the very opposite extreme. According to Garat the following was Danton's programme at this time: Renewal of both Committees, immediate peace, the stopping of the Terror, the abolition of the Maximum, the calling back of the *émigrés*, the release of the suspects and general amnesty.

Robespierre would never have agreed to such a programme. Not that he believed in a war of conquest. "We must arm", he said, "not to go to the Rhine—that means war without end—but to impose peace: a peace without conquest." He was, however, opposed to any peace move as long as a single foot of French soil remained occupied by the enemy, and said so emphatically. He believed victory certain, Danton doubted its possibility. Moreover, if as a result of immediate peace the Revolutionary Government would have to go before the Republic was firmly founded, the succeeding reaction might sweep away the half-finished structure.

Danton's idea of calling back the *émigrés*, releasing the suspects, stopping the Terror and declaring general amnesty has gained him many friends among historians. It seems broad and humane. A critical examination, however, shows it to have been impractical and contradictory. Calling back the *émigrés* and releasing the suspects was incompatible with either the stopping of the Terror or with general amnesty, since the recalled *émigrés* and the released suspects would immediately have substituted a White Terror for a Red Terror. If Danton sincerely believed that he could prevent this from happening then he made the mistake later

made by the Thermidorians. They likewise imagined that they could control the reaction, yet the White Terror, which immediately set in—and about which historians have kept singularly silent—“surpassed in horror”, says Louis Blanc, “even the massacres of September, even the fusillades of Collot d’Herbois, even the drownings of Carrier”. It lasted at least as long as the Red Terror and according to Nougaret made 30,000 victims in the Midi alone, practically all of whom were massacred without even the pretence of a trial. Yet the Thermidorians allowed only those *émigrés* to return that had left France after the insurrection of the 2nd of June.

It is, however, a moot question whether Danton and his friends sincerely believed in a policy of mercy or whether their advocacy of such a policy was not a mere preliminary to counter-revolution. In a letter sent out by the Dantonist Bourdon (of the Oise), which fell into the hands of the police, he says that the suspects would soon be released and *their places taken by those who put them there*. Danton had openly become the champion of the upper bourgeoisie, as is shown by his opposition to such measures as compelling them to turn in their gold against assignats. The royalist Mallet du Pan was of the opinion that Danton wished to pave the way for a return of the monarchy, and the American ambassador (Gouverneur Morris) received the same impression. We have, furthermore, the testimony of Lafayette and of the Duke of Chartres (the later Louis Phillipe of France) regarding Danton’s royalist tendencies.

Danton’s change of front is not difficult to understand. He was hopelessly compromised with the revolutionists. In December, 1793, he made a pathetic appeal at the Jacobin Club, yet, but for Robespierre’s interven-

tion on his behalf, probably would have been expelled. His only hope of playing an important role was to place himself at the head of the reaction. Moreover, he, who as late as September, 1793, had advocated a multiplication of the Revolutionary Tribunal, so that at least one head a day might fall, now began to realize that his own was in danger. Two of the men implicated in the Indian Company scandal—Chabot and Basire—had brought his name into the case, and his principal lieutenant, Fabre d'Églantine, on whose behalf he tried to intervene, was soon to be under arrest in connection with the same unsavoury affair. He had, therefore, private as well as public reasons for putting himself at the head of the "indulgents".

Saint-Just said of the Danton faction: "It wants to be happy and enjoy life". If such was its purpose, it would have got what it wanted had its move succeeded, for judging the results of its policy by what happened after Thermidor, a riot of corruption and self-indulgence on the part of the bourgeoisie would have set in. But the Terror would merely have been shifted from Paris to the Gironde Departments; from summary legal to summary illegal procedure; from the royalists and the Girondins to the Jacobins. Danton's programme was, therefore, broadly humanitarian only in appearance. In reality it was a class programme, as much as Robespierre's. Danton had merely picked up the torch that had dropped successively from the hands of the Constitutionalists and Girondins. He came to represent the Third Estate, Robespierre remained loyal to the Fourth.

IV

After Danton's return from Arcis-sur-Aube, Robespierre was like a captain commanding a ship during a

battle, while having to maintain himself on the bridge against an attack from a number of the crew (among whom at the same time a fight has broken out which he is trying to quell) and hindering stowaways from boring holes in the hull of the vessel. That under such circumstances he was able to remain master of the ship and steer it to victory, is no mean feat of statesmanship.

Philippeaux published a pamphlet attacking the Committee's policy in the Vendée, at a time when that policy was about to be crowned with success. Fabre d'Églantine got the Convention to vote the arrest of some of the Committee's most important agents. Bourdon (of the Oise) almost succeeded in upsetting the government by securing a vote for the renewal of both Committees, which it was intended to pack with Dantonists. When this move failed, he and Danton sought to cripple the Committee by making it incumbent upon it to secure the consent of the Convention for each separate expenditure! This would effectively have paralysed all war operations had not the Committee simply ignored the order. Against all this mining and intriguing Robespierre's clever political manœuvring might not have prevailed had not victories come to strengthen the Committee's position. But for the recapture of Toulon, the government probably would have fallen. "They want our places?" Robespierre exclaimed bitterly. "They're welcome to them!"

With the exception of Fabre d'Églantine, Danton's most valuable aid in this campaign was none other than Robespierre's old friend, Camille Desmoulins.

If doubt is permissible regarding Danton's motives, none is possible in the case of Desmoulins. Camille's judgment was grievously at fault, his motives were pure. He was a creature of impulse. Consider, for example, his attitude towards the Girondins. He had

Robespierre's attitude towards Desmoulins was that of an elder brother repeatedly trying to save his junior from the consequences of his mischief. Already in the Constituent he had intervened to save Desmoulins from arrest, when the latter, from the gallery, had interrupted a deputy who was protesting against an attack Camille had made upon him. When in December, 1793, it was Desmoulins' turn to be publicly examined at the Jacobin Club, Robespierre took the floor in his defence. He mildly upbraided Camille for being too hasty in his judgment of people (a fault from which Robespierre was far from free himself) and recommended him to keep his versatility in check. But he said that Desmoulins was a lover of liberty and a republican by instinct. After his speech, Desmoulins' retention was voted amidst great applause. We will see him take Camille's defence on several other occasions.

On the 5th of December, 1793, Desmoulins made his re-entry into the journalistic field with the first number of *The Old Cordelier*. Five days later followed the second number. The first two numbers appear to have been read by Robespierre before publication. They condemned Cloots and the exaggerations of the Hébertists. The five remaining numbers were written under the inspiration of the Dantonists.

When the third and fourth numbers appeared, they spread consternation in the revolutionary camp, while the royalists rejoiced and were willing to pay almost any price to obtain a copy. Desmoulins boasted of having sold 50,000 copies. He no longer contented himself with condemning exaggeration and anti-religious intolerance. He now attacked the revolutionary structure itself, criticizing the Revolutionary Government, its policy, its methods. In the form of a biting allegory he ridiculed the Law of Suspects. All those to be feared,

he said, had either emigrated or perished in the Vendée. The Republic had no other enemies within except women, children and helpless old men. He demanded that the prison doors be opened and the suspects be released.

Perhaps the reader will better be able to grasp the significance of this if he will consider what would happen to a journalist in Germany if he were to ridicule the Nazi government and make a demand for the abolition of the concentration camps. Yet Germany to-day is not at war with all Europe and does not have to contend with armed rebellion within. When Desmoulins made his attack, Wurmser had just forced the lines at Wissembourg and the enemy was at the doors of Strasbourg; the English, the Spanish and the royalists were still holding Toulon; the Vendée was still ablaze, and Lyon, Marseilles and Bordeaux had but recently been subdued.

Desmoulins proposed a Committee of Mercy to deal with the suspects. Now, it so happened that Robespierre had just introduced a measure calling for the creation of a Committee of Justice to sift the political prisoners and release such as appeared harmless. Desmoulins knew this, for he refers to Robespierre's proposal. But now Robespierre's move for mercy was hopelessly compromised. Such a howl arose in the revolutionary camp that no choice remained except a tightening of the lines. For Robespierre to have insisted on his committee would have identified him with the "indulgents". Besides, Desmoulins' appeal, by being addressed to him personally, was a serious danger to him. It increased the hostility of those of his colleagues who already resented his unauthorized supremacy.

Since shrewder men than Desmoulins had undoubtedly suggested the personal appeal, it is well to

inquire what object they had in view. Maximilien's attitude in regard to the seventy-five Girondins, the mildness of his Lyon policy, his wrath at the bloody proconsuls and the exaggerations of the Hébertists, his proposal of the Committee of Justice, had led them to suppose that he would be taken in by the Trojan horse (counter-revolution in the guise of mercy) which they got Camille to dress up for him. If they could get him to break openly with the Committee—which in spite of differences held together—the government could be overthrown. They probably would have rewarded him with a place in the new government, where, his prestige gone, he would have been of little hindrance to them.

The news of the recapture of Toulon reached Paris. The government felt greatly heartened. On the 25th of December, Robespierre appeared in the tribune at the Convention and made it known that the Committee remained united and the Revolutionary Government would be maintained. "That government", he said, "must steer between two reefs: weakness and heedlessness—indulgence and excess. Indulgence, which is to moderation what impotence is to chastity; excess, which resembles energy as dropsy resembles health." He made it plain that if placed before the fatal choice of reaction or too rapid an advance, he would choose the latter: "A vigorous body, tormented by a superabundance of energy, holds more promise than a corpse". To both sides he gave this warning: "The Revolutionary Government owes to good citizens its fullest protection, it owes to the enemies of the people nothing but death".

V

Why, one will ask, did Robespierre not establish a censorship? Such a measure, in time of war, civil war

and revolution, would have been fully justified. He had once expressed himself very forcibly in favour of the liberty of the press, but he was a realist. When explaining the necessity of a Revolutionary Government he had said that an organism ravaged by disease cannot be indulged like a healthy body. In the catechism before-mentioned, found among his private papers, the control of the printed word receives particular attention. If a censorship was not established it was probably due to the fact that public opinion would not have countenanced such a measure. Liberty of the press was a revolutionary fetish it was dangerous to touch. There was, of course, an indirect censorship. Editors soon learned that if they overstepped they would be called to account, and conducted themselves accordingly; but still we find such a strange phenomenon as Roux being allowed to publish attacks upon the government while in jail.

Camille was not fitted for the political chess game, in which he was nothing but a pawn. He felt surprised, hurt, confused, a little frightened. If the Committee objected to his third number (he wrote in his fifth issue) then he was willing to imitate Fénélon and burn it himself. He had already given orders that it was not to be reprinted. But Hébert having accused him of changing front since he had married into money, he could not forgo the satisfaction of taking a few pokes at Father Duchesne. Where did Hébert get his money? Was it not a fact that he had been dismissed for pilfering when a ticket seller at a local theatre? Was he not now selling papers to the war office for the soldiers at the front at an exorbitant price?

On the 5th of January, 1794, the two factions came to grips at the Club. Hébert clamoured for justice. Desmoulins waved aloft his proofs. Collot d'Herbois

—just returned from Lyon and hailed by the Hébertists as a saviour—denounced Philippeaux. Augustin, back from Toulon, said he was tired of personalities. What is it to us, he said, if Hébert filched while selling theatre tickets? This raised a laugh, while Hébert raised his eyes to the ceiling and asked of the universe: “Do they intend to assassinate me to-day?”

Robespierre, like a schoolmaster among a crowd of unruly schoolboys, whacked right and left. This for Augustin: “He has rendered great services in Toulon, but fails to realize how unwise it is to give encouragement to either side in a personal quarrel”. This for Hébert: “It ill becomes a man who deals in calumny himself to complain about being slandered”. This for Desmoulins: “I’ll wager that the proofs Camille has shown are far from conclusive”.

It was decided that on the 8th of January, Camille, Philippeaux and Bourdon should be given an opportunity to justify before the Club their attacks upon the government. That evening the hall was packed to overflowing. People paid as high as twenty-five francs for a seat. When Camille took the floor, it was no biting sarcasm, no scintillating wit that flowed from his lips, as it had from his pen. He looked pathetic and forlorn.

“I confess I don’t know any more where I am at, whom to believe, what side to take”, he stammered. “Really, I am losing my head.”

He stood in danger of losing it not only figuratively, and Robespierre, anxious to shield him, came to his aid.

“Camille’s recent writings”, he said, “should be condemned. But you should distinguish between the man and his work. Camille is a good but spoilt child, who has the unhappy faculty of allowing himself to be led astray by bad company.” He then proposed that the

Club symbolize its disapproval by burning the offending issues of Desmoulins' paper, and let it go at that.

Now, this was what Desmoulins himself had but recently proposed, but unfortunately he happened to remember that Rousseau had said: "Burning is not replying". What an opportunity to use that shaft against the disciple of Rousseau who was reading him a lecture! True, he was risking his head, but that, to an artist at repartee, was a minor consideration. He let fly:

"Burning is not replying!"

It hit Robespierre in his most tender spot. He stopped, swallowed.

"So be it!" he said. "I withdraw my motion. Let his paper be read and let him receive an answer. Know, Camille, that if you were not Camille, one would not be so patient with you. The manner of your defence convinces me of your bad faith. Burning is not replying! In what way does that quotation fit the present case?"

"But did I not come to see you? Did I not read my paper to you?" protested Camille. "Did I not beg you in the name of friendship to indicate to me the road I should take?"

"You did not read all the issues to me," Robespierre replied sternly. "I saw only one or two. Not wishing to mix into personal quarrels, I refused to read the others. People would have said I dictated them to you."

Robespierre's reply is not convincing. Why did he not allow Camille to read the remaining numbers to him, and if he disapproved, say so emphatically? One somehow receives the impression that he was not unwilling to have Camille test public opinion without himself incurring responsibility. Undoubtedly Desmoulins went much further than he had wished him to

go, but whose fault was that? He had shirked responsibility not only as a friend, but as a public man; and if Desmoulins—who with rare self-knowledge spoke of himself as a weathercock—had fallen under the influence of Danton and his doubtful companions, none but he was to blame.

The secretary now read the third issue of Desmoulins' paper. It was listened to with ominous silence. At the following meeting the reading was resumed. The fourth issue was read, and the reading of the fifth was about to begin, when Robespierre relented. Everybody was sufficiently enlightened, he said, about the hodge-podge of sense and nonsense, truth and untruth Camille had dished up. It was time the Club ceased occupying itself with Desmoulins and his paper. He and Hébert were both at fault. What really mattered was the plot hatched by foreign agents, which was back of all this discord.

While he was speaking, Fabre d'Églantine rose to his feet. Now, the clever playwright, poet and author of the republican calendar was the original protagonist of the foreign agent theory that became such an obsession with Robespierre. In the early days of October, 1793, Fabre had demanded to be heard by a special commission he himself was allowed to pick from members of the two governing Committees. Before this body he had accused Proli, Pereira and Desfieux of being foreign agents, and Danton's friend Hérault de Séchelles of being their principal protector in the government. Robespierre, a member of the commission, did not like Fabre. The author had an annoying way of looking at him mockingly through his eyeglass when he (Robespierre) spoke in the tribune, as if inwardly amusing himself at his expense. But he had listened eagerly, for what Fabre was saying confirmed his own

suspicions. Lately, however, he had begun to believe that Fabre had made the denunciation principally to shield himself, and that he was one of the main conspirators and Desmoulins' evil genius. He was even more right than he supposed, for a few days later documents were found that proved Fabre guilty of corruption and of falsifying a government decree. He now fixed the playwright with his eye and said:

"If Fabre has his theme ready, I have not yet finished mine. I demand that this man, whom one always sees manipulating an eyeglass, and who is so clever at unravelling plots upon the stage, come and unravel the present plot. We shall see what success he will have."

Fabre took the floor and denied that he had influenced Camille or had conspired with Bourdon and Philippeaux. He was listened to with impatience and incredulity, and one man shouted: "To the guillotine!"

Robespierre jumped to his feet. "I demand that the man who made that remark be expelled from the Club instantly!" he cried.

The expulsion was voted.

The following meeting the Hébertists had a temporary innings. Taking Robespierre by surprise, they managed to pass a motion expelling Camille. But he quickly recovered himself and returned to the fray. Why, he asked, this discrimination against Camille—he who had in the past rendered such signal services to the Revolution—while Bourdon and Philippeaux were allowed to remain members? An exasperated Hébertist, realizing what the outcome would be, shouted: "Dictator!" but Maximilien did not abandon the fight until the motion expelling Desmoulins had been repealed.

VI

Robespierre, as we know, intended using the Revolutionary Government not only to ward off foreign invasion, but to place the Jacobin Republic upon an enduring basis. This could be accomplished only by the creation of a new, large social class, possessing economic power, which would be loyal to the Republic and to the Jacobin ideal. The sale of Church lands and of the land of the *émigrés* had only partly accomplished this. Owing to the manner of sale such lands had mostly fallen into the hands of speculators and well-to-do bourgeois, not especially keen about universal suffrage and other ideals of the Jacobins. Besides, as Robespierre had often said, the Revolution meant nothing to him unless it brought about material improvement in the lot of the common people. Robespierre and Saint-Just now proposed to create the new social class and at the same time take a step towards the abolition of poverty, by confiscating the property of wealthy royalists and bourgeois opposed to the Republic and dividing it among propertyless republicans.

It may almost be said that they were compelled to do this. If economic power remained in the hands of royalists and wealthy bourgeois, the Jacobin Republic would be quickly overthrown as soon as the Revolutionary Government and the Terror came to an end. What was more, the White Terror would take its toll of vengeance. Thus the Terror *could* not end and democracy *could* not be established until the Revolution had penetrated into economic relationship. This is the meaning of the Laws of Ventôse—the most revolutionary legislation passed during the French Revolution, and sponsored by Robespierre and Saint-Just.

There were at that time in the prisons of France a

great many royalist suspects. Desmoulins estimated their number at 200,000. Mathiez—who has made a special study of the subject—at one time gives their number as 100,000, at another, as 300,000. Robespierre and Saint-Just proposed to sift these suspects by means of special commissions, which would have the power to release, to deport, or to hold for trial before the Revolutionary Tribunal. The property of the deported and of those convicted by the Tribunal was to be confiscated and divided among indigent republicans, lists of whom were to be compiled by the Communes.

The gigantic task of sifting the population of France (for besides those already in custody thousands of others would have to go through this sifting process) could, obviously, not be carried out with the ordinary delays of the law. Time pressed. "Victory is pursuing Robespierre", said one of his enemies, and he was right. Victory meant peace. Peace meant the end of the Revolutionary Government and the Terror. The end of the Revolutionary Government and the Terror meant counter-revolution and the White Terror. Legislation was, therefore, necessary to speed up proceedings and at the same time ensure relative justice to the prisoners. Hence the famous Law of Prairial, which has brought down the historical lightning on Robespierre's head, and the law concentrating all political trials in Paris and making it possible only for the highest authorities to send people before the Revolutionary Tribunal. The two laws together—although not used in the spirit and for the purpose intended by Robespierre—did not aggravate the Terror, as is generally believed. The Terror *seemed* to increase, because it was concentrated in the capital, but it practically ceased in all the rest of France.

Such is Robespierre's responsibility in the Terror,

and on this rock he foundered. There is ample evidence to the effect that the failure of the Committees to enforce the Laws of Ventôse and their misuse of the Law of Prairial were principally responsible for the quarrel between Maximilien and his colleagues, which led to his overthrow. The amazing sanguinary legend so long attached to his name is now recognized by all serious historians to have no basis in fact. He condemned all wanton use of the Terror, all indiscriminate slaughter, all private and public vengeance. He condemned Collot d'Herbois' fusillades as he would have condemned Thiers'. He hated the bloody proconsuls who made of what he conceived as an instrument of justice and social transformation, imposed by necessity, an instrument of murder. We have Napoleon's testimony to the effect that while in the Alpes Maritimes he saw numerous letters from Maximilien to his brother, in which he said that the proconsuls by their senseless cruelty would wreck the Republic. He spoke of them as "scoundrels gorged with blood and rapine". He was instrumental in recalling Carrier, Tallien, Fréron, Barras.

He seems to have envisaged his task as not unlike that of a military commander. "This frightful war", he said, "which liberty is waging against tyranny, is it not one and indivisible? The enemies within, are they not the allies of those without?" If one argued that innocents were caught in the meshes of the Terror, he replied that everything possible should be done to prevent this, but that the soldiers who died at the front were likewise innocent. Yet he was merciful, as a soldier can be merciful. It is not surprising that at the news of his death (before it became evident that the reaction which had set in would make continuation of the Red Terror impossible) consternation reigned in the prisons. "Our woes are not yet ended, since we still have rela-

tives (upon whom they can wreak vengeance) and since the Robespierres are dead", Nodier reports the prisoners saying to one another.

VII

Robespierre had been ill at home since the middle of February and was not seen in public for nearly a month. It was Saint-Just who with his usual trenchant language brought the Laws of Ventôse before the Convention and secured their passage. "To daret is all the politics of Revolution", he said. "A few more strokes of genius are necessary to save us." It was evident that Maximilien's frail constitution was beginning to break under the strain. There was to come a time when he would faint during a stormy session of the Committee. His popularity was as yet unimpaired. Delegations came to inquire after his health. Innumerable letters from the provinces spoke their concern and expressed hope for a speedy recovery.

Robespierre's physician, Souberbielle, was a member of the jury of the Revolutionary Tribunal. One day he came in breathlessly and related that a new prison massacre was impending. Two staunch Hébertists—Ronsin, Commander of the Revolutionary Army, and Vincent, a high official at the War Office—had told him so in the garden of the Tuileries.

The principal cause of the Hébertist fury at this time was the propaganda of the Dantonists. Fear was at the bottom of it. Many of the Hébertists were government functionaries. If nothing worse happened to them, they would lose their jobs if the Dantonists won. A bureaucrat in fear of losing his job is one of the most ferocious of mortals. Many, however, stood in fear of their lives. For with all their talk of mercy the Dan-

tonists made no secret of the fact that they had no intention of being indulgent to the Hébertists. One of them—whose name Robespierre kept charitably secret when he related the incident at the Convention—came running into the room where the Committee was meeting and demanded three heads on the spot. Desmoulins hardly demonstrated a Christian spirit when the Hébertists were executed, and with boyish cruelty even wished to make a sort of carnival procession out of their march to the scaffold. So the Hébertists were perhaps frightened with reason, and came to the conclusion that Robespierre was far too easy, and not the man to hold back counter-revolution. At the Cordelier Club, where they were in complete control, they hung, in sign of mourning, black crape over the poster heralding the Rights of Man, and one heard sneering remarks about a certain “revolutionary cripple” and “revolutionary has-been”. Their hero was Collot d’Herbois, who in Lyon had turned cannon on the prisoners and had cavalry sabre and men with pick-axes finish those who still breathed. They called him the “Giant”.

There may still have been another reason for the Hébertist outburst. Whatever fault may be found with Robespierre’s and Saint-Just’s expropriation proposal, it did not lack definiteness, and was about as radical as anything the Hébertists had ever thought of (or had been able to appropriate from Roux and his friends) unless it be the “agrarian law”—too extreme to be practical. The proposal cut the ground from under their feet. They saw a vision of their followers deserting to the Robespierriest camp. And, in truth, that was what was happening. Tour la Montagne and others tell of the enthusiasm aroused in Paris by the Ventôse Laws. What was there left for the Hébertists except to give the populace something even more concrete and im-

mediate? So, for a start, they intended to give it a massacre of the prisoners, division of the specie at the mint, and distribution of the foodstuffs in the army supply houses. Hébert's theory was that now that the army was again on foreign soil, it ought to live off the country.

The Hébertist strength was not negligible. On the Committee of Public Safety they had Collot d'Herbois. They had Ronsin's Revolutionary Army and many sympathizers among the soldiers at the front and in Paris on leave. For through his connections at the War Office Hébert managed to get a good part of every issue of *Father Duchesne* distributed to the armies at government expense. They had the Cordeliers and thousands of government officials and employees. They had, furthermore, managed to organize a dual organization in practically every section and were about to consolidate these in a central body. They were not sure of the Commune, where Chaumette vacillated, but even without it felt strong enough to carry out their programme, which undoubtedly included a siege of the Convention and complete seizure of power.

It was on the evening of the 4th of March that Hébert, at the Cordelier Club, for the first time picked up courage to denounce Robespierre openly. What had especially aroused his ire was Maximilien's insistence on getting Desmoulins, who had called him (Hébert) a thief, reinstated at the Jacobin Club. "Remember", he said, "that a certain man—misled, no doubt, otherwise I would hardly know how to qualify his conduct—happened to be on hand conveniently to get him reinstated, in defiance of the popular will." He spoke of "men, hungry for power and insatiable, who pompously repeat the word ultra-revolutionaries in their lengthy speeches, hoping thereby to destroy the in-

fluence of true friends of the people, who are keeping a watchful eye on their ambitious schemes”.

Finally, he made the following call to action:

“Well, then, because such a faction exists, because we are aware of it, what is the best way to rid ourselves of it? Insurrection! Yes, insurrection! And the Cordeliers won’t be among the last to give the signal to strike dead the oppressors!”

The Cordeliers cheered him to the echo. Carrier—whom Robespierre had recalled from Nantes, but for the sake of keeping peace on the Committee did not yet call to account (if Carrier was to be punished, why not Collot?)—gave Hébert every encouragement. So did Ronsin, Vincent and Momoro. But Hébert, a coward at heart, already quaked at his own temerity. During the succeeding days, when he noticed that his words had found no response in the city, he became more and more alarmed. Paris did not stir. The suburbs did not march. The tocsins remained silent, and their silence was like a foreboding of death. At the wine shops workmen were discussing the Ventôse Laws and thought the government in excellent hands.

Collot came to the Cordelier Club and tried to patch up matters. He got them to remove the black crape from the Rights of Man and carried it with him as a peace-offering to the Jacobin Club. A delegation of Cordeliers came to the Jacobins and staged a reconciliation, but the Jacobins remained distant. Hébert hastened to explain that what he had meant was a “moral insurrection”. All of no avail! In his sick-room Robespierre was conferring with Saint-Just. On the 13th of March, the tall, knightly figure of the man, whom Michelet has called the “Archangel of Death”, appeared in the tribune at the Convention, and in sentences like the glitter of a sword pronounced the doom of the Hébert-

ists. "Measures have been taken to arrest the guilty parties. They are cornered!"

During the night, Hébert, Ronsin, Vincent and Momoro were seized, and on the evening of that day, Robespierre, for the first time since his illness, appeared at the Jacobin Club and stated the government's position. Still another taken into custody was Anacharsis Cloots. The charge against him of being a foreign agent was as absurd as it was unjust. One of the most damaging things that can be said against Robespierre's character is that he practically never rose to the height of recognizing the sincerity of an opponent. He might have learned from his well-beloved classics that it is possible to pursue a man even unto death and yet abstain from slandering him and even to weep over him.

One wonders how the theory originated that Robespierre sought Danton's aid against the Hébertists or played one faction against another. Nothing is further from the truth. In practically every speech he and Saint-Just made in the course of February and March they denounced the Dantonists as well as the Hébertists, and the former even more than the latter. In the very speech in which he announced the imminent arrest of the Hébertists, Saint-Just attacked the Dantonists with equal ferocity. The two factions, he said, were "smothering liberty between two crimes". The only reason why the Hébertists were arrested first was because they gave every indication of having decided to turn from talk to action.

The Hébertists were sentenced to death. All, except Hébert, died bravely. He, who had clamoured for heads and ever more heads, lacked the courage to surrender his own with becoming dignity.

VIII

There is a letter from Robespierre to Danton, written at the time of the death of the latter's first wife, in February, 1793, which reads as follows :

"If in a misfortune such as this, and such as alone could disorientate a soul like yours, the certainty of having a loving and devoted friend can be any consolation to you, then I offer you that consolation. I love you better than ever, with a love that will last until death. In moments like this I feel one with you. Do not repulse a friendship that shares your pain. Let us weep our dead together and seek relief in activity against the tyrants responsible for so many public and private ills. My friend, I would have communicated my heartfelt sympathy to you while you were in Belgium, and I would have been over to see you, had I not thought it best to respect your privacy in your hour of affliction."

ROBESPIERRE

There is no other letter of Robespierre that so warmly expresses sympathy for any human being. He must have felt admiration as well as friendship for Danton—a man of his own calibre. They were different, yet alike, as a cavalryman's sword and a fencer's rapier are different, yet alike. When did he first begin to suspect Danton? As late as December 3, 1793, he defended him at the Club. But although his appeal probably saved Danton from expulsion, and Desmoulins warmly thanked him for it, the note of doubt is unmistakable. "Perhaps I am wrong about Danton. Differences of opinion between him and myself have made me observe him closely, sometimes with anger, for I did not always approve of his manner of serving the people."

The memorandum he gave to Saint-Just (in accordance with which the latter revised his accusatory report against the Dantonists, previously read to the Committee) makes it obvious that doubts regarding Danton's loyalty to the revolutionary cause had been accumulating in his mind since the beginning of the Revolution: Danton's relations with the Duke of Orleans; his strange immunity after the Champ-de-Mars massacre; his abandonment of him (Robespierre) during the anti-war campaign; his questionable behaviour on the eve of the attack on the Tuileries; his manœuvring during the King's trial; his more than equivocal conduct during the Dumouriez betrayal; his inexplicable prosperity; his lavish mode of life; his attitude during the final struggle with the Gironde leaders—numerous coincidences, rumours, accusations. But all this he had thrust from him persistently. He did not want to believe it. He did not want to correlate it. He did not wish to be convinced. When defending Danton at the Club, he said bitterly: "Don't you know then, Danton, that it suffices to be a patriot to be slandered? Don't you know what they accuse you of? I'll tell you. They accuse you of having left Paris in order to emigrate, in order to offer your services to the counter-revolution. Did you not know that? Well, then, learn it now. Neophytes in the revolutionary movement—but who, it appears, are better able to serve it than either you or I—go about saying these things."

No, he did not want to believe the rumours, the charges. He thrust back his own suspicions. When shortly after the arrest of Fabre d'Églantine, Billaud-Varenne proposed during a session of the Committee that Danton, too, be placed under arrest, Robespierre got up in a rage and accused Billaud of plotting the ruin of the best patriots. But a few weeks later, Robespierre

"consented to abandon Danton"—as Billaud puts it. What had happened in the interval? What made his doubt turn to certainty? What new, convincing proof of Danton's guilt had been presented to him? We know of none.

Perhaps the explanation can be found in an incident Madame Lebas (Elisabeth Duplay) relates in her memoirs. She was recovering from an illness and went to stay in the country with Madame Panis. One day, the older woman took her to Sèvres, to a villa where Danton was staying. Elisabeth did not know Danton. When she happened to be alone with him, the man who had said once: "I must have women!" took her violently in his arms and made an improper proposal. The young girl managed to disengage herself and fled to her friend, demanding that they leave immediately. Madame Panis begged her to say nothing of the incident at home, but Elisabeth refused to promise.

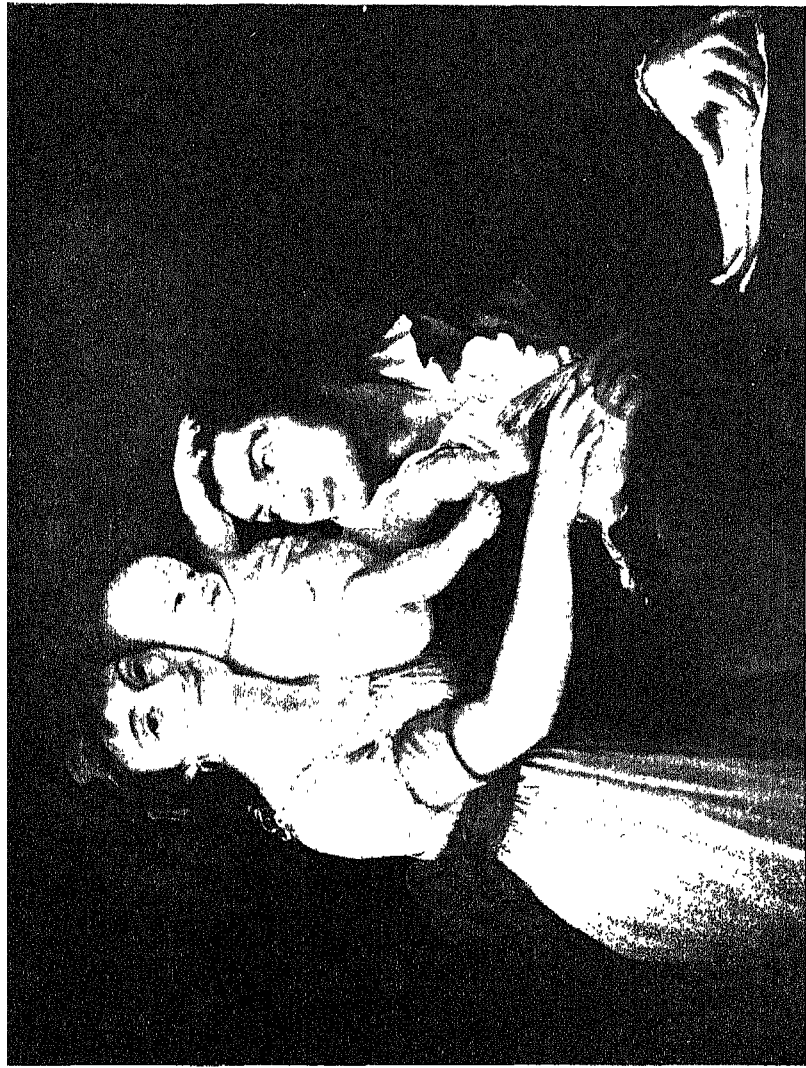
Is it possible that what happened was even more serious than Madame Lebas cared to put down in her memoirs? But even if it was not, such an incident, if related by Duplay at the psychological moment to a man of Robespierre's temperament, who, moreover, was extremely fond of Elisabeth, might have had a decisive influence upon him. Seized with indignation against Danton, he might have opened violently as it were the lumber-room of his memory. All that had been equivocal in Danton's conduct since the beginning of the Revolution would lie there before him. For the first time he would pick up incident after incident, charge after charge, rumour after rumour. He would proceed to examine them carefully, to fit them together, as one fits together a jigsaw puzzle, and the picture that would emerge would be startlingly convincing. And because he had loved Danton, because he

had stubbornly defended him, he would feel his conduct as a personal betrayal. Rage would seize him. He did not merely abandon Danton, as says Billaud-Varenne, he turned on him fiercely.

There is a paragraph in the Saint-Just memorandum that goes to confirm the above interpretation. Robespierre writes: "The word virtue made Danton burst into laughter. There was no more solid virtue, he said, than the kind he practised nightly with his wife. How can a man to whom all idea of morality is a closed book be the defender of liberty?"

More difficult to understand than his abandonment of Danton is his abandonment of Desmoulins. For, while at the time of Danton's trial no conclusive proof of his corruption and counter-revolutionary activities existed, yet the moral conviction of his corruption was so strong among his contemporaries that, after Robespierre's death, Danton was one of the six deputies who perished under the Terror whom the Convention refused to rehabilitate. No such presumption of guilt weighed upon Desmoulins. He was not accused of corruption, and if he had aided counter-revolution, it was with no deliberate intent of doing so. Why, then, did Robespierre not protect him? Charlotte tells us that her brother went to see Desmoulins in prison and offered to save him if he would abandon his dangerous activities, but that Desmoulins refused. Her story cannot be given credence. There is no confirmation of it anywhere. Besides, while Desmoulins had many admirable qualities, he was far from being a hero and had few settled convictions. One is inclined to believe that had such an offer been made, he would have accepted it.

That Robespierre could have saved Desmoulins had he been determined to do so is almost certain. He saved Hanriot, whom the Committee wished to arrest as an



CAMILLE DESMOULINS WITH HIS WIFE AND CHILD

ally of Hébert. He saved the Hébertist Boulanger. The latter had been at the Cordelier meeting when Hébert had made his call to action. He had encouraged Hébert, saying that he and others were ready to strike the blow. But when his name was included with those who were to be arrested, Robespierre demanded that it be stricken out. "When a man has always acted with courage and patriotism, I demand more convincing proof than that before I believe him to be a traitor", he had said. Boulanger was not molested. Why did Robespierre not do the same for his boyhood friend? Assuredly he did not want him to die. He had defended him over and over again and had braved the fury of the Hébertists to get him reinstated at the Club. The answer to this historical and psychological enigma can be found in Robespierre's relations with Saint-Just.

It was told about Saint-Just that when he was with the army of the Rhine, he came early one morning into a camp he had not yet visited. From one of the tents a partly dressed young man came running and threw himself into his arms. It was a boyhood friend. Now, Saint-Just had issued an order that all officers and men were to sleep fully dressed, ready for battle. So, having returned his friend's embrace, he told him that much as he loved him, he yet welcomed the opportunity to prove to the army that he played no favourites when it came to serving his country. He thereupon ordered his friend to be shot.

The incident never happened, but the fact that the story was told and believed throws light upon Saint-Just's character. He was a Spartan. He despised Desmoulins, who was an Athenian. "I despise him. I have read his heart and he fears lest I betray him", he wrote concerning him in an early unsent letter. Desmoulins

was unreliable, dissipated, morally corrupt. There was no room for such as him in Saint-Just's conception of the Republic—a conception far more rigorous than Robespierre's. Desmoulins had aided the counter-revolution. That was enough. His motives did not matter. He must die!

Now, Saint-Just was Robespierre's disciple, and what a disciple! Beautiful as Apollo, inflexible as Cato, brave as Achilles. What a challenge to the older man must have been the admiration of such a pupil! Robespierre could have saved Desmoulins. He could have said, "I won't permit Camille to be executed!" as he had said, "I won't permit Boulanger to be executed!" as he was to say, "I won't permit Catherine Th  cot to be executed!" and he would have been obeyed. But he dared not do so and meet the eyes of Saint-Just, precisely because Desmoulins was his friend. Vanity, or loyalty to principle? Probably both.

He made one feeble attempt. In the memorandum he handed to Saint-Just—and in which he heaps accusation upon accusation upon Danton, with the fury of one who feels himself betrayed—this is what he says concerning Camille:

"Desmoulins proved his honesty and his republicanism by censuring with vehemence in his publications Mirabeau, Lafayette, Barnave and Lameth, when they were at the height of their power and glory, and that notwithstanding he had previously lauded them in good faith."

What is this but an ill-disguised plea from the master to the pupil? But Saint-Just did not or would not understand, and when the order for arrest was presented to him, Robespierre signed.

Perhaps he still hoped that Desmoulins would be spared, as Lullier, tried with the Dantonists, was

spared. It is not impossible that Camille might have been, had he not in his excitement and out of loyalty to his friends thrown all caution to the wind during the trial.

Esquiros tells of an incident which Desmoulins' biographer, Jules Claretie, mentions as probably having influenced Robespierre. The paragraph already quoted from the Saint-Just memorandum definitely proves that it did not, but the reader may judge for himself.

One day Elisabeth—whose chastity seems to have been subjected to a veritable siege by the Dantonists—came to Robespierre's room, very much disturbed, and handed him a book. It was a copy of *l'Arétin*, containing a number of lewd illustrations.

"Who gave this to you?" Robespierre asked indignantly.

"Camille."

He put the book away. "Never mind, little girl", he said. "It is not what enters involuntarily through the eye that corrupts us, but the evil desires that are in the heart. I'll give Camille a warning."

IX

The arrest of the Hébertists made that of the Dantonists almost inevitable. The Dantonists were celebrating, and all the reactionary forces of the capital—who had formerly pinned their hope to the Gironde and now pinned it to Danton—regarded Hébert's execution not as Robespierre's triumph, but Danton's. He had merely played Robespierre against Hébert, and would get rid of the former in his own good time. They underestimated Robespierre's strength, and so did Danton. "Robespierre! I'll put him on the ball of my thumb and spin him around like a top", he said once. When Thibau-

dau warned him that Robespierre was planning his undoing, he said fiercely: "If I thought he as much as dreamt of such a thing I would tear out his bowels".

The growing animosity between the two men began to alarm their mutual friends. Humbert, Robespierre's landlord at the time when he had shared lodgings with Villiers in the Rue de Saintonge, arranged a dinner party, to which he invited both. There are two conflicting reports of what was said between them. Neither appears very probable. The only thing that seems worthy of credence is that Robespierre remained "cold as marble", and that, he being the first to leave, Danton exclaimed when the door had closed behind him: "The devil! We must get busy. There is not a moment to lose."

But he did not get busy. He was a man of action only by fits and starts. Usually he was indolent. Moreover, he felt himself secure. "They dare not. I am the ark", he said.

Camille had no such illusions. When he called on Robespierre and the latter, for the first time, refused to receive him, he said to a friend: "I'm lost!"

On the night of the 30th to the 31st of March, the butts of muskets rattled down on the pavement in front of the houses where dwelt Danton, Desmoulins, Delacroix and Philippeaux. A knock on the door. "In the name of the law!" . . . The arrest of the principal Dantonist leaders was an accomplished fact.

When the Convention assembled the following morning, consternation was depicted on the faces of many of the deputies. There were awed whispers. Danton's friend Legendre asked for the floor. In a voice trembling with emotion he said that four deputies—of whom Danton was one—had been arrested during the night. He demanded that the Convention give them a hearing

before voting whether or not the arrest should be upheld.

Robespierre arose. He confirmed the arrest, but demanded to know why a privilege denied to others in the past should be extended to "an idol long since putrid". He spoke defiantly, passion was in his voice:

"I was once a friend of Pétion. He unmasked, and I abandoned him. I kept up relations with Roland. He betrayed, and I abandoned him also. Danton wants to take their place, and in my eyes he is nothing but an enemy of the Fatherland.

"Attempts have been made to frighten me. I have been told that if I allowed Danton's life to be endangered, my own might not be safe. I have been told that he was useful to me for my personal defence, as a kind of buckler. That he was like a rampart, which once overthrown would expose me to all the attacks of the aristocracy. Well, then, let it be known that none of these arguments has as much as brushed the surface of my soul. Let it be known that were it to be a fact that Danton's peril was to become my own, I would not regard it as a public calamity. What care I for danger! My life is my country's. My heart is exempt from fear, because it is devoid of crime. If I die it will be without reproach and without ignominy!"

During this impassioned harangue he had to stop several times, interrupted by thunderous applause.

Saint-Just then read his accusatory report. It was adopted unanimously. The Dantonists were cowed. The fact, however, that the Convention refused to restore Danton's name to honour after Robespierre's death, with hardly a voice being raised in protest, proves that belief in his guilt must have been pretty general, and that the Danton of the legend must be quite another personality than the Danton of history.

The story of the trial of the Dantonists belongs to the history of Danton and Desmoulins. Danton defended himself with courage and ability, if somewhat theatrically. To the student of history his defence lacks conviction. "I, sold to Mirabeau?" he shouted; but there is Mirabeau's letter to Lamareck—since come to light—that accuses him. "I, a partisan of the royalists?"—but there is the testimony of Lafayette and of Louis Philippe of France that he told them so himself.

We may admire Danton—as courage and ability are always worthy of admiration—but our truest sympathy goes out to Desmoulins. He died for what on his part was nothing but a generous impulse. His weakness touches us more than Danton's strength; his sorrow and despair, more than Danton's bravado.

The tumbril in which Maximilien's former friends were taken to the scaffold passed by the Duplay house. The *porte-cochère* was locked, the shutters closed; the house was like a tomb. Perhaps within Robespierre was thinking that if on a certain day, in December, 1793, when Desmoulins came to read his third issue to him, he had not refused to listen, this man who was almost like a younger brother might not now be in so terrible a plight. And not only he, but his wife Lucile, whose sister Maximilien was once to have married, and who was arrested for conspiring with Dillon and others to start a prison revolt. Before this, she had written a letter to him, which for some reason she never sent: "Oh, Robespierre! you who have joined our hands in yours; you who have smiled upon my son, whose little hands have so often caressed you, can you reject my prayer, despise my tears, trample justice underfoot? . . ."

He had once tried to save Madame Elisabeth, but, according to his reported statement, Hébert tore her from him. Now Hébert was dead, but there is no

evidence that he tried to save Lucile. The grey eyes of his disciple froze him into uncompromising observance of their stern code.

X

He has now reached the zenith of his power, the little lawyer from Arras. His enemies are dead, or dare not stir. The counter-revolution has drawn in its head. The fourteen armies of the Republic—which he has made it possible to create by ruthlessly suppressing all that might confound or weaken the governing will—hold the enemy in check on every battle-front. Soon they will inflict a decisive defeat upon him. To Europe, to the world, Robespierre personifies the Government of France. “Robespierre has decreed”, write the English newspapers, which likewise report the movements of “Robespierre’s armies”. A British agent writes that Pitt fears lest all government become concentrated in his hands, which will make it harder than ever to overcome the Republic.

This mighty man lives not, like our modern dictators, in a palace, but still in his little garret-like room at the Duplays. There is no sentry at his door: only Madame Duplay and Eleonore scrutinize the visitors. In the weathershed under his window the saws wheeze, the planes sigh, and the hammers talk.

Robespierre feels that his work has prospered. One thing, however, is still worrying him. The religious disorders, which long ago have ceased in Paris, continue in the provinces. The commissioners of the Convention write for definite instructions. Robespierre feels that what is needed is a positive rather than a negative attitude. It is not enough to defend freedom of worship. In the battle between atheism and established religion, both sides displease him. He does not

like the Church, but neither does he like atheism. He believes with Rousseau that it is as great a danger to the State as religious fanaticism; and, in truth, in his day, it was as intolerant as the most bigoted religion. Individuals, he feels, can be atheists, if they choose, the State cannot. It cannot remain indifferent when it sees thousands who find the atmosphere of established religion oppressive—as he himself has found it so—go erring in, what he considers, the desert of atheism. It must build them a shelter. But that shelter must be broad. It must span all established religions, as the dome of heaven arches above cathedral, synagogue and mosque. This is what he puts down as the cardinal doctrine of the new faith: “The People of France recognize the existence of the Supreme Being and the immortality of the Soul”.

What he has arrived at is Rousseau's Civic Religion, expounded in *Émile*. He showed himself, however, more tolerant than Rousseau. He did not wish to banish atheists, as Rousseau proposes, and later opposed their expulsion from the Club. As every religion, if it is to remain alive, must have its ritual, so he outlined a ritual for his Civic Religion. At regular intervals there would be great civic festivals in honour of the Deity, Humanity, Equality, Liberty, Truth, Justice, Courage, etc. Artists would be called upon to lend their services to make these solemn, beautiful and impressive.

Such was the crowning ornament Robespierre decided to place on the summit of the edifice he was building after the plans of his master Rousseau.

XI

Nothing shows the ascendancy of Robespierre over his colleagues of the Committees and in the Convention

as his ability to put through this measure, to which the great majority of them was undoubtedly opposed. Few things he ever did earned him greater hostility. It was one of the chief reasons why Vadier, of the Committee of General Security—a rabid Voltairian—hated him, though he should have remembered Voltaire’s saying: “If there were no God, it would be necessary to invent Him”. Fouché, who while Commissioner of the Convention at Nevers had had the inscription “Death is an eternal sleep” placed over the entrance to a cemetery, saw in the measure an additional reason for continuing to work for his overthrow. But great as was the resentment of his colleagues, they dared not oppose him. Billaud-Varenne grumbled to him in private: “With your Supreme Being you are beginning to get on my nerves”; but in public he too kept silent.

If, however, the enthusiasm of the Convention was more simulated than real, and if some of those who read the speech placarded upon the walls of Paris by order of the National Assembly, pulled a wry face, in the provinces, where fanatical atheists had made attendance at public worship hazardous, this emphatic official affirmation of the nation’s belief in the existence of the Deity was hailed with rejoicing. An “infinite number of letters” (says Courtois) rained in on Robespierre. Communes and congregations passed resolutions thanking and lauding him. In one community cries of “*Vive Robespierre!*” followed the singing of the *Te Deum*. Mirabeau’s sister called him, in a letter, “an eagle sailing the skies”. Europe turned its face towards him and commented that, whatever his political and economic doctrine, he, obviously, was the one man in France who stood for order, authority and stability in that sorely tried country.

But as his fame and popularity increased the distrust

of his colleagues likewise grew. Many honestly believed that such popularity was a menace to republican institutions. Was it possible that a man should enjoy such prestige and not make selfish use of it? How long would it be before he would try to give the authority he exercised a more solid foundation?

Two attempts on Robespierre's life at this time still further increased his popularity. Charlotte says that there were several such attempts which he did not even trouble to make public. Once a man of Herculean build asked to see him in private. Left alone with him, he threw himself upon him and attempted to strangle him. When help arrived he took to his heels. Another time, two men demanded a private audience. Their flight, the moment they were questioned, left no doubt about their intentions. But this time the would-be assassins were caught, so there was no hushing up the matter.

The first attempt was made by Ladmiral, a discharged government employee. He came to the Duplay house and asked for Maximilien. Hidden in his clothing was a loaded pistol. Told that Robespierre was busy and could not receive him, he went to the Convention hall, where he felt sure his victim would eventually come. Barère was in the tribune, reading a lengthy report. It proved so soporific that Ladmiral could not keep awake. When he woke up, Robespierre was no longer there. So he stationed himself in the gallery leading to the chambers of the Committee of Public Safety. But Robespierre remained invisible. Discouraged by these repeated failures, he decided to content himself with Collot d'Herbois, who lived in the house where he lodged himself and could not escape him. He waited for him on the stair-landing, and when towards one in the morning Collot arrived, there was a struggle and a pistol-shot. A man who had rushed to Collot's aid

was slightly wounded. L'admiral, taken into custody by a passing patrol, confessed that it was Robespierre he had originally wished to assassinate.

The second attempt was made by a girl of twenty, Cécile Renault, who might have been inspired by the example of Charlotte Corday. She came one evening, towards nine, to the Duplay house and asked to see Robespierre. Told that he was not at home, she became angry. He was a representative of the people, she said, and should be accessible to every one. Her behaviour aroused suspicion, and she was taken before the Committee of General Security. When searched, she was found in possession of two knives. Asked why she had wanted to see Robespierre, she replied that she wished to see what a tyrant was like, and that she preferred one king to fifty thousand tyrants.

The effect of these attempts was, as has been said, to increase his popularity still further. He was given ovations at the Convention and at the Club. Former Dantonists proposed at the Club that he be given a bodyguard. This may have been an astute move on their part to injure him, or a clumsy attempt to prove that they were now Robespierrists to the core. He declined the honour with considerable acerbity.

XII

On the 4th of June, 1794, Robespierre was elected for the second time President of the National Assembly. The election was unanimous. Four days later, the Feast of the Supreme Being, decreed by the Convention, was to take place, and his election was partly for the purpose of enabling him to occupy on that occasion the place rightfully due him.

On the morning of the 8th, Robespierre arose early.

The sun was shining into the court. The sky above was a limpid blue. The hairdresser came, and like all hairdressers probably commented upon the weather. He curled, dressed and powdered Maximilien's hair with especial care that day. When he had left, Robespierre scraped the powder from his face with his toilet knife (as Barras caught him doing once) and performed his ablutions. He put on white silk hose, nankeen breeches, silver-buckled shoes, a shirt with fine lace point cuffs, a lace jabot, a light-coloured waistcoat, a new sky-blue coat, and tied a gorgeous tricolour scarf about his slender waist. There lay likewise ready for him a large three-cornered hat, surmounted by red, white and blue plumes, and a bouquet composed of ears of wheat, fruits and flowers. Such a scarf, hat and bouquet were to be the distinguishing marks of every deputy marching in the procession scheduled for that day. Thus attired, he went downstairs, where, no doubt, he had to submit to the admiring inspection of the household. Breakfast was ready, but he declined to join the family at table that morning, and went out.

He walked down the Rue St. Honoré, towards the Tuileries. Every house displayed a flag, and some were decorated with bunting or garlands of leaves and flowers. The people he met, who greeted him with friendly respect, were in holiday attire. He felt happy, happier perhaps than he had ever felt in his life.

At the Tuileries he met Vilate, member of the Revolutionary Tribunal. Vilate had lodgings in the Pavillon de Flore, the windows of which give upon the Tuileries garden. He asked Maximilien if he had breakfasted, and learning that he had not, invited him to breakfast in his room. Maximilien, he tells us, ate little. He was constantly drawn to the window by the spectacle of the gaily attired multitude that thronged the

garden. "Behold," he said with emotion, "the most worth-while portion of the human family. The universe is here assembled. How sublime is Nature's work. How the tyrants must tremble at the thought of this feast."

He was so absorbed that he forgot to watch the clock. He was due at the Assembly at nine. It was already past that time and messengers had been sent to look for him. When he noticed the hour, he left hastily. As he entered the hall, he was applauded, but there were those who said: "He has made us wait purposely. He acts as if he were king."

Headed by Robespierre, the deputies now filed out of the shadowy hall into the brilliant sunshine, and ranged themselves in an amphitheatre erected against the building. Robespierre took up a position at a little pulpit in the centre. When the last notes of the Marseillaise that greeted the appearance of the Convention had died and the applause had subsided, Robespierre spoke: "God", he said, "has not created kings to be the devourers of the human race. He has not created priests to harness men like dumb, driven cattle to the royal chariot. He has made the universe to testify to His greatness. He has made men to aid and cherish one another and to find happiness upon the path of virtue. . . ."

There was great applause, but among the deputies there were some who muttered sneeringly: "Listen to the pontiff!"

Robespierre then descended towards a great circular basin, in the centre of which was a statuary group, made of inflammable material, representing, in hideous form, Atheism, Egotism, Discord and Ambition. A lighted torch was handed him and he touched it to the group. A column of flame and smoke shot up high into the air, while the multitude applauded. When the flames died and the smoke cleared, there was revealed a

statue of Wisdom, which, however, was badly smudged, an eventuality David, who had planned this, had not foreseen. Some considered it an ill omen.

Robespierre had returned to the pulpit and spoke again, briefly: "Let us be grave and discreet in our councils," he said, "imperturbable in danger, patient in labour, terrible in reverses, modest and vigilant in success, merciful towards the unfortunate, inexorable towards the base, just towards all. Let us crush the impious league of kings by the elevation of our national character even more than by the force of our arms."

The chorus of the opera now intoned a chant, and then a procession was formed. First came twenty-four of the sections, then the deputies, each wearing a plumed hat and tricolour scarf, the same as Robespierre, and carrying a bouquet like his. In their midst advanced, drawn by eight oxen with gilded horns, a symbolical float, upon which a sheaf of wheat, a plough and a printing press reposed under the spreading branches of a tree of liberty. Then came the remaining twenty-four sections, and then the multitude. The procession wound its way past the Invalides—the inmates of which stood at salute as it passed—towards the Champ-de-Mars.

Robespierre, as President of the National Assembly, walked alone and a few steps ahead of his colleagues. But as the procession advanced, either by accident or design (if the latter, not on his part) the distance between him and the remaining deputies became ever greater, until, at last, he walked, a man apart. Among his colleagues there were audible murmurs, which later in the day were to reach his ear:

"Notice how they applaud him!"

"It is but a step from the Capitol to the Tarpeian rock!"

"It is not enough for him to be Master, he wants to be God!"

"There still are men capable of acting Brutus!"

He, as yet unconscious of all this, walked head erect, feeling he had been faithful to a great trust. If he thought of the blood the Revolution had cost, he felt convinced that the guilt redounded upon those who had oppressed the people, or had wilfully placed themselves in the way of its legitimate aspirations. Little did he imagine that he himself was to be accused of this, that when his headless body would be lying in quicklime, Barère was to mount the tribune at the Convention, and speaking in the name of the ultra-terrorists who took the initiative in overthrowing Robespierre, was to say that he had died because he had "tried to stop the terrible, majestic course of the Revolution".

On the Champ-de-Mars, where once had stood the Altar of the Fatherland, there had been heaped up a great, symbolical mountain, shaded by a tree of liberty. The deputies, headed by Robespierre, ascended the mountain, around which ranged themselves in solid phalanx what in the literature of the day are referred to as "adolescents", each with a sword at his thigh. On either side were grouped thousands of musicians and choristers. A vast multitude was all around.

Clouds of incense ascended. A trumpeter, perched upon a column, blew a starting signal, and there rose towards heaven the hymn Chénier had written for the occasion and Gossec had set to music. A hundred thousand voices took up the chant, trumpets blared, the bells of the city started clamouring, cannon boomed, the boys drew their swords and raised them aloft, girls flung handfuls of flowers high into the air. . . . At the summit of it all stood the little lawyer from Arras, and closed his eyes, and perhaps thought what he had said

CHAPTER TWELVE

FALL AND DEATH OF ROBESPIERRE

I

THE conspiracy to overthrow Robespierre originated with "the men gorged with blood and rapine", whom he wished to call to account for the tyranny they had exercised while proconsuls. He made no secret of the fact that he intended to execute half a dozen of them. Saint-Just, while with the army of the Rhine, had seized the Jacobin priest Euloge Schneider, who had been guilty of gross injustice and tyranny, had exhibited him for four hours on the platform of the guillotine in Strasbourg, and had then sent him to Paris to be tried. Here, among the mass of suspects, Schneider might have been forgotten had he not committed the imprudence of writing to Robespierre, who immediately took up his case. The Fouchés, Talliens, Barras, Frérons, Carriers, Rovères knew that when Robespierre thundered from the tribune at the Convention: "Woe unto him who turns the Terror, reserved for public enemies, against the people itself. Unimaginable are the excesses committed by hypocritical counter-revolutionaries to injure the cause of the Revolution", he did not merely refer to Schneider, but likewise to them. They trembled for their lives. Barras, in his memoirs, describes the humiliating reception he and Fréron received from Robespierre when they went to call upon him immediately after their recall. Ignoring their flattering advances, he treated them with utmost contempt, not

so much as deigning to address a single word to them. He frightened Fouché out of his wits and finally drove him from the Jacobin Club. They knew his persistency. They knew that although they were deputies, had powerful protectors in the government, and were, therefore, harder to reach than Schneider, he yet would eventually get his way if he remained in power. Their only hope of escape was in overthrowing him. Their courage was the courage of desperation, the only kind of courage of which a Fouché and a Tallien were capable. But they did not think it possible to overthrow him without bringing down the entire Revolutionary Government. Hence their original plot was not only against Maximilien, but against the Committees. It was not until the 8th of Thermidor, when the conspirators saw how hopelessly the Committees were divided, that they decided to make victory certain by concentrating on Robespierre and his two friends.

There were many men in the Convention willing to aid them. Lecointre had had an accusatory speech against the government stuck away for some time among the arsenal he usually carried in his pockets. He and Bourdon (of the Oise) had indulged in sarcastic remarks during the Feast of the Supreme Being. Bourdon had once seriously contemplated bringing down the government by assassinating Robespierre in the midst of the Convention. But Maximilien happened to look at him during a speech he was making, and Bourdon took to his bed, ill with fright. Leonard Bourdon, who had quarrelled with Robespierre at the Club, was likewise ready to join the conspiracy. Danton's friends Courtois, Legendre and Thuriot were eager to avenge the fallen tribune. Others, who were indifferent, were brought into line by being shown a list—which the conspirators claimed had fallen into their hands providentially—

on which were entered the names of deputies to be turned over to the Revolutionary Tribunal. The list was a forgery, but had the effect of frightening the deputies to such an extent that some thirty no longer dared sleep at home, for fear of being arrested overnight. The Law of Prairial, interpreted to mean that deputies could be turned over to the Tribunal without consent of the Convention, seemed to confirm the warning of the conspirators. There is no reason to believe that Robespierre meant the law to have that significance. Why should he have wished to give additional power to a Committee on which his influence was rapidly waning, at the expense of a Convention he was still able to control?

II

While the ultra-terrorists and others were preparing their plot against the government, there was hatching within the government itself a plot against Robespierre. The principal reason for the dissension between Robespierre and the Committees was, as has been said, his determination to enforce the Laws of Ventôse, and their determination not to do so. Barère's confidant Vilate, Robespierre's confidant Buonarroti, the members of the Committees themselves in their replies to Saladin and Lecointre—all testify to this. Barras mentions as a further reason the misuse of the Terror by Robespierre's colleagues of the Committees, but this is part of the same problem. The issue was whether the Terror should be used to create a new social class of small property owners loyal to the Republic—and thus make a speedy return to normal conditions possible by eliminating the danger of counter-revolution and the White Terror—or whether the social and economic structure of France should remain unchanged, and the

Terror should keep on striking indefinitely, confusedly, ineffectively.

Robespierre, undoubtedly, might have avoided a great deal of friction by a more conciliatory attitude. He has been often accused of "tyranny of opinion", and the charge is not unfounded. He was a democrat by conviction and an autocrat by temperament. He loved equality as a matter of principle, but did not really brook equals. He might have made an excellent dictator, for he was just, immensely capable and not unmerciful, but since he had thought it unwise or impossible to obtain dictatorial powers, he should have adopted a less dictatorial attitude. Had he been less imperious, less intransigent, more diplomatic, he could have accomplished infinitely more. Thus, there was no necessity for him to have antagonized the Committee of General Security by ignoring it in the preparation of the Law of Priarial. It was not the law itself—which had been contemplated for a long time—which aroused that committee and Billaud-Varenne, but Robespierre's high-handed manner of putting it through. And it is difficult to believe that Billaud-Varenne would have opposed him on the Laws of Ventôse had Robespierre handled the matter differently.

Besides the cardinal issue above mentioned, there were numerous minor differences, many of them of a personal nature. Vadier and several others hated him for his religious policy. Ill-feeling between him and the Committee of General Security became intense with the organization of the Bureau of General Police, under the management of Saint-Just. The Bureau, created by the Convention, had for its principal purpose keeping a watchful eye on the chief government functionaries. The Committee of General Security claimed, however, that the Bureau had arbitrarily

enlarged its functions and was encroaching on the committee's authority.

On the "Great" Committee Billaud-Varenne and Collot d'Herbois protected the ultra-terrorist proconsuls he wished to punish. Saint-Just pictures Billaud-Varenne as Robespierre's chief enemy in the government. This seems surprising, since Robespierre and Billaud were not far apart in political and economic doctrine. It has been claimed that Billaud was consumed with envy for Robespierre. This appears more than probable, yet Maximilien's irascible and dictatorial manner gave him much provocation. Billaud later bitterly regretted the stand he had taken, which Saint-Just characterizes as enigmatic, contradictory and insincere. Often during meetings of the Committee Billaud would close his eyes and pretend to slumber. At other times he would mumble: "We're walking on a volcano!" or, pale and taciturn, would stare fixedly before him.

Saint-Just quarrelled with Carnot about the conduct of the War Office, and Robespierre took the side of his young friend. Saint-Just went so far as to threaten Carnot with the guillotine, whereupon the latter defied him to do his worst and exclaimed: "You're a pair of mock dictators!" After the battle of Fleurus, Saint-Just's quarrel with Carnot grew especially bitter. Carnot had ordered the transfer of troops from Jourdan's army without consulting Saint-Just, who, being on the ground, understood the situation better than he. But for the fact that Carnot's order was not carried out, the blunder would have cost the French the city of Charleroi.

The principal quarrel between Robespierre and Carnot concerned the latter's insistence on sending artillery belonging to the sections out of Paris. Carnot's action

in this regard seems to have been motivated by political rather than military considerations. The Commune was now Robespierrist to the core. To weaken its military power meant to weaken Robespierre. But Carnot failed to consider that if Robespierre drew his strength from the Commune, so did the Revolutionary Government, of which Carnot was a part. To overthrow Robespierre meant to overthrow the Commune. To overthrow the Commune meant the end of the Revolutionary Government and the Jacobin Republic. We do not know to what extent Carnot believed in the Jacobin Republic, but we know that he believed in the Terror. Practically every order consigning people for trial before the Revolutionary Tribunal is signed by Carnot. Few are signed by Robespierre. Carnot's amazing excuse that he signed without reading has been accepted without questioning, which proves the historical advantage of having no pronounced opinions on social or economic subjects.

III

Robespierre's enemies on the Committee of General Security decided to seek revenge. It took the general form of throwing all the blame for the excesses of which the committee was guilty upon the Bureau of General Police, that is, upon Robespierre. But this was not the only means at the committee's disposal to harass and depopularize him. Taking advantage of the attempts upon his life, it immolated to him fifty-four royalists in a peculiarly spectacular fashion. They were led to the scaffold clothed in red, as "assassins of the National Assembly", therefore parricides. Among them were Cécile Renault's father, brother and aunt; a certain Madame Saint-Amaranthe and her beautiful young

daughter, and a poor little seamstress, a child of barely sixteen, who when placed upon the plank of the guillotine is reported to have asked the executioner: "Do I hold my head right, *monsieur*?" Stories were circulated about Robespierre having been a regular visitor at Saint-Amaranthe's gambling house in the Palais-Royal, and desiring her death because he had had the imprudence, while under the influence of drink, of communicating State secrets to her; and of Saint-Just being in love with her beautiful daughter. Both stories were false, as was also the story that Cécile Renault had been Robespierre's mistress and that he had her guillotined because he got tired of her; but they served their purpose almost as well as if they had been true.

Most of the victims were undoubtedly guilty of plotting against the Republic, and compared with the toll exacted on similar occasions by modern revolutionary governments their number appears moderate. It is, however, admitted by most historians that the committee's intention was not so much to protect the National Assembly as to deal a blow to Robespierre's popularity. It was not of the Convention or of Collot d'Herbois—upon whom Ladmiral had finally emptied his pistol—that the populace was thinking as the tumbrils with the red-shirted sacrifice trundled down the streets of the city, but of Robespierre.

There is no record of any protest made by Maximilien against the execution, but the reader may safely take it for granted that he did protest. Self-interest, if no nobler sentiment, would have evoked a protest from him. But his colleagues on the "Great" Committee, not loath to see his popularity diminish, undoubtedly told him that it was not a question of avenging him, but of protecting the Assembly.

Men have lost their popularity, have been feared and

hated, yet have remained at the head of government. But what man can govern when he has become the butt of the populace? Vadier—more than likely aided by Barère, whom Robespierre had defended many times at the Jacobin Club—next levelled a blow at Maximilien that, it was hoped, would finish him by rendering him ridiculous.

There lived at that time in a narrow street back of the Panthéon an old woman by the name of Catherine Théot. She had at one time been an inmate of an insane asylum, but this did not hinder her from gathering about her a certain number of converts to the form of religion she preached. The particulars of her doctrine are not important, but she was known among her followers as the "Mother of God", and the sect indulged in rites of an absurd osculatory nature. Among her adherents was a former member of the Constituent Assembly, a monk by the name of Dom Gerle, who had voted with the Left, and to whom Robespierre had issued a certificate of civism. A sister-in-law of Madame Duplay likewise seems to have found consolation in Catherine Théot's religious vagaries.

It is more than probable that but for these circumstances—which established a link, however slender, between her and Robespierre—Catherine would not have been bothered. But Vadier, whom his secret agents had acquainted with all these details, now suddenly saw vast possibilities in the affair. The gathering of religious zealots could be metamorphosed into a royalist conspiracy, and if the link between Catherine and Robespierre was slender, it could be easily strengthened by the use of that imagination on which Vadier prided himself.

So a raid was made on Catherine Théot's apartment, and she and a number of the illuminati were taken into

custody. And, behold! under her mattress was found a letter personally written by her to Robespierre, in which she addressed him as "Son of the Supreme Being", "Messiah designated by the Prophets", "Eternal Word", and "Redeemer of Mankind". This was all the more remarkable since the art of writing was not among Catherine's accomplishments. Could anything have been more opportune after the Feast of the Supreme Being?

A week after that feast, the fifty-eight-year-old Vadier, his eyes gleaming with satisfaction, and smiling a Voltairian smile, appeared in the tribune at the Convention to make his report about the royalist cancer he and his committee had found festering under the guise of religion in the very heart of Paris. Robespierre presided, and pale and frowning had to listen to an account of all the absurd details, which Vadier made even more absurd and related with gusto. Vadier was careful not to mention Robespierre by name, or to speak about the letter, but since all the deputies knew about it anyway, this did not make a great deal of difference. The Convention rocked with laughter and sly glances were being cast at the sombre chairman, who could ill conceal his displeasure. Chasles, in his memoirs, says that Vadier boasted after the session: "Ah! Ah! You see, when I made my report, fanaticism was struck down—just like that! It will be a long time before it raises its head again. And Robespierre?—Annihilated! Finished! I've demolished him!"

Perhaps the result would have been all he had expected had the case come to trial and the letter become public property. The Prosecutor, Fouquier-Tinville—who hated Robespierre and in all probability was in the conspiracy to overthrow him—was anxious to push the trial, and announced that the case was, without a doubt,

a dangerous royalist plot. But Robespierre's patience was at an end. There was a violent scene in the Committee of Public Safety between him, Billaud-Varenne and Collot d'Herbois. Did he threaten with his lightning? Very likely he did. The upshot of it all was that Fouquier-Tinville was summoned before the Committee. He found the members seated at the long table. Robespierre, curtly and authoritatively, told him, in the name of the Committee, that the prosecution of Catherine Th  ot—whom Vadier had rechristened Th  os (God)—must be dropped instantly. Fouquier started to object, but was cut short. He went to the Committee of General Security to complain.

"He—he—he—does not want it," he told that committee.

"That means Robespierre?" asked Vadier.

"Yes."

Vadier knew when it was time to stop teasing the lion. The case was dropped. Robespierre appears to have demanded from his colleagues the dismissal of Fouquier-Tinville, but this was refused. The case of Catherine Th  ot marks the culminating point of the differences between Robespierre and his opponents on the two Committees. Soon after he withdrew from all participation in the government.

IV

According to his own statement, Robespierre ceased attending the meetings of the Committee about six weeks before Thermidor. To make his retirement even more complete, he did not take part in debates at the Convention. He occasionally spoke at the Club, where he criticized the government's policy of using the Terror to punish trifling offences, instead of employing

it for the great revolutionary measures that would found the Jacobin Republic firmly.

But even at the Club his ultra-terrorist enemies had gained a considerable footing, to such an extent that Fouché managed, on a day when Robespierre was absent, to insinuate himself into the presidency. When Maximilien heard of this he appeared at the Club with fire in his eye. He had hoped to find Fouché there, but the elusive ex-priest, informed that storm was threatening, had discreetly stayed away. Robespierre tore him to tatters nevertheless, and Fouché was summoned by the Club to come and answer the charges. But he was not the man to fight in the open. He failed to put in an appearance and was promptly expelled. "Does he fear", shouted Robespierre, "to face the people? Does he fear lest in spite of nature's attempt to hide his eyes from view, six thousand eyes fixed upon his read in them the dark secret of his soul? Does he fear lest his words betray the embarrassment of guilt?"

Fouché's expulsion from the Club left him no further doubt that if Robespierre remained in power his own life was not worth a farthing. He set to work with even greater diligence weaving his net about him. Yet it cannot be said that he used quite the finesse one might have expected from the future Chief of Napoleon's Secret Service. He wrote a compromising letter to his sister in Nantes, which promptly fell into the hands of an agent of the Committee, who forwarded it to Paris. Had the letter arrived but one day sooner, Thermidor might have had quite a different aspect.

The uneasiness in the government, the Convention and the Club had communicated itself to Paris. The air seemed surcharged with electricity. It was like the sultriness before a storm. People felt that something fateful and momentous was impending. Strange

rumours were flying. One day newsboys ran through the streets shouting the amazing news: "The great arrest of Robespierre!" They were themselves promptly arrested.

Robespierre gave no evidence of anxiety. He had resumed his evening walks with the family, which stress of work had forced him to abandon. On these excursions he and Eléonore would walk together. What did they say to each other? What plans did they make? We do not know. But we know that he had a presentiment of death. He was at that time writing an important discourse he meant to deliver at the Convention. While writing, the thought escaped him that it was his testament. He allowed the sentence to remain.

Perhaps it was at this time that he said to Elisabeth—not a great believer in the existence of the Deity: "You are wrong. Unbelief will make you unhappy. You are young yet, Elisabeth. Believe me when I tell you that faith in God is our only consolation on earth."

Except for the speech he was preparing, he took no measures to checkmate his opponents. While they conspired at night, he went to bed early. He organized no committee of action, as he had the previous year when he had overthrown the Girondins. He did not confer with Hanriot, the Commander of the National Guard, who was loyal to him. He paid no heed to the warnings of Payan, the National Agent, to be on his guard. He discouraged talk of a popular uprising. Where organization and force alone could have assured him the victory, he sought solitude and inspiration. He paid a visit to Montmorency, and, seated in front of Rousseau's empty cottage, listened to the rustling of the leaves and meditated upon the man who had been his inspirer and teacher.

Had he changed so greatly from the previous year,

or were there other reasons for his inactivity? The issue now was far more personal. Then the country had been in imminent danger, now the danger seemed to be threatening him personally. He himself probably realized that with him the Jacobin Republic would fall, but to the average man this was not immediately perceptible. Cambon and Billaud-Varenne—both far above the average in intelligence—failed to realize it, and would later regretfully say that, had they known, they would never have helped to overthrow him. Robespierre hesitated to organize a rebellion on what seemed largely a personal issue. He had denied and had kept on denying that he was striving for a dictatorship. To have made use now of the armed forces of the Commune could have been given no other interpretation. So he resolved to trust to oratory alone, knowing full well that the odds were greatly against him.

There is at the Carnavalet a proclamation addressed to the Section of Pikes, on which, together with other signatures, appear the first two letters of Robespierre's name. Around this document there has been woven an interesting legend. It was claimed that it was a call to arms addressed by the Commune to the sections on the night of the 9th of Thermidor. Robespierre, asked to sign it, was supposed to have picked up a pen, but having written the first two letters of his name, to have thrown it down again, preferring to perish rather than to march upon the Convention.

The iconoclastic Mathiez has definitely proved that the legend has no foundation in fact. The document was one of many similar documents sent out to the sections on that fateful night, and the minutes of the Section of Pikes prove that it was duly received. The unfinished signature was due to the prevailing confusion. The spots on the paper—supposed to have been

made by blood from Robespierre's wound—are probably inkstains. Yet the sacrifice with which Robespierre is credited actually was made by him, only it was made *before* the 9th of Thermidor. Payan, Coffinhal and others begged him to take energetic action, or permit them to act for him. He refused to give his consent.

Perhaps something of lassitude, of fatalism, of scorn and pride likewise entered into the state of mind that made him walk into the arena armed only with a roll of paper. Some of that lassitude had already manifested itself the previous year, when he was preparing the insurrection against the Gironde. And when he says, on the 8th of Thermidor: "I have read in history how all the defenders of liberty have succumbed under the weight of calumny, but their oppressors have followed them into the grave. The good and the evil alike vanish from this earth, albeit under different circumstances", he seems to be echoing the fatalist who wrote the *Ecclesiastes*.

But if Robespierre was serene, some of his closest friends were uneasy to the point of despondency. Elisabeth—who had married Lebas and now was the mother of a child—tells us that less than a week before Thermidor, when she and her husband were walking in the Marbeuf garden, Lebas suddenly said to her: "If it were not a crime, I would blow out your brains, and mine too. Then at least we would die together. But, no! There is that poor little child. . . ."

V

Robespierre's enemies in the government were, however, far from feeling happy themselves. They dreaded an open conflict with him. They saw the danger that threatened not only him, but them, too, from their

common enemies in the Convention. They were a minority government. Once the bars went down they all would be trampled under by the victorious reaction. Besides, if Robespierre took the field against them, he would dispose of a powerful weapon. He could claim that they were unworthy of confidence, since they had failed to put into effect laws decreed by the Convention—the Laws of Ventôse. The secret wish of the great majority of the deputies was that these laws should remain a dead letter; but with the Commune and the Jacobins to back him, Robespierre might yet rally a substantial majority on that issue. It was the subtle Barère who pointed out these dangers to his colleagues.

The Law of the 23rd of Ventôse provided for six commissions to sift the suspects. Only two had been thus far appointed, and the lists drawn up by them, subject to the approval of the Committees, had remained neglected. On the 1st of Thermidor, the Committees held a joint meeting and approved the lists. On the 4th, they met again, and took measures for the appointment of the four remaining commissions. Having thus prepared the ground for reconciliation, the Committees invited Robespierre to come and meet with them on the morrow.

Robespierre came. Saint-Just, in the speech he had meant to deliver on the 9th of Thermidor, but of which he was able to pronounce only a few sentences, gives an account of the meeting. When all were seated there followed an awkward silence. Finally, Saint-Just arose and said:

“You seem depressed. I believe it is best that we speak our minds frankly. If you will allow me, I’ll begin by doing so.”

He told them that a Swiss officer—taken prisoner before Maubeuge—had related that the allies counted

on the conspiracy (of which they appeared to have knowledge) to overthrow the Revolutionary Government, the forceful decisions of which had been so fatal to them. He defended Robespierre against the charge of dictatorship. If Robespierre was a dictator, where was his treasury? where his army?

David, of the Committee of General Security, seconded him, and then all eyes turned towards Maximilien.

Robespierre was uncompromising and belligerent. "He spoke", says Barère, "as one who had orders to give and victims to designate." He denounced the members of both Committees for their failure to put into effect the Laws of Ventôse, although more than four months had elapsed since their passage. He called his colleagues "the most solid bulwark of the counter-revolutionaries". He assailed Vadier, Amar, Jagot, Collot, Billaud. His intransigence on this occasion has received justification from the fact that after Thermidor the members of the Committees claimed that their promise to put the Ventôse Laws into effect was only a ruse! It is true that when they said this they were themselves under attack, but their opposition to these laws had been sufficiently stubborn to justify literal acceptance of their statement.

Billaud-Varenne now arose and tried to conciliate Robespierre.

"We are your friends", he said. "We've always marched hand in hand."

The previous day (comments Saint-Just) he had compared Maximilien to Peisistratus and had levelled all sorts of accusations against him.

To satisfy Robespierre still another decision was reached which seemed to insure the speedy enforcement of the disputed laws, and to Saint-Just was en-

trusted the task of making a report to the Convention. Billaud and Collot took the precaution, however, to ask him to leave the Supreme Being and the immortality of the soul in peace. Saint-Just on his part made the concession of consenting to the removal of further artillery from Paris.

Thus harmony appeared to have been restored. That same evening, Barère, with his usual oratorical flourish, assured the Convention of the unity of the government. Voulland, of the Committee of General Security, wrote to his constituents that all rumours concerning discord in the government were false. Couthon made a similar statement at the Jacobin Club on the evening of the 6th. But the man whom it was most necessary to conciliate said nothing and had made no promise. Perhaps for a moment he had wavered. What probably decided him to reject the offer of peace was an incident that took place on the 5th of Thermidor at one of the city prisons.

The Gironde deputies whom he had saved were confined at the Madelonnettes prison. Robespierre had purposely refrained from appearing to take an interest in their personal welfare, since to have done so might have been a danger to them. Had not Vadier, irritated at the apparent fondness of the moderates for Robespierre, been reported as saying: "If this keeps up I'll have *him* behead a hundred or so of the frogs in his Marsh?" By this he meant that he would manage to have the Committees send a hundred or so of the deputies of the Plain (also called the Marsh) to the guillotine and would then scatter the rumour—as he was in the habit of doing—that Robespierre had ordered the execution! Now, on the very day the Committees had invited him to meet with them, Amar and Voulland, of the Committee of General Security, had

gone to visit the imprisoned deputies and had professed to be horrified at the lack of consideration shown them. "What! you are being deprived of coffee, chocolate, syrup, fruit! Your mail is being tampered with! Speak, dear colleagues, speak! The Committee of General Security has sent us here to console you and to listen to your legitimate complaints."

It is reported that Amar, who had written the report that kept these men in prison, actually wept as he shook the hand of every deputy in turn. He, thereupon, gave orders that every consideration be shown the prisoners and that their correspondence was not to be subject to the usual inspection—the latter, obviously, so that the deputies might inform their friends in the Convention that the Committee of General Security was their champion against the Commune.

When Payan handed him the report of the visit, Robespierre became convinced that peace was impossible. "They only want to gain time to bring their nefarious schemes to completion", he said in his speech of the 8th of Thermidor. Remaining aloof from the Committees was, however, insufficient. It did not alter the situation, and, whether he wished it or not, France and the world continued to regard him as the head of the government and to hold him responsible for its decisions. He resolved to follow his original plan and to attack both Committees as well as the conspirators in the Convention. The victory of Fleurus, by removing the danger of foreign invasion, made it possible to risk the attack. It likewise made it imperative that the risk be taken, for it brought nearer the day when the Revolutionary Government would have to go. If the Jacobin Republic was to be placed upon an enduring basis and the White Terror averted, there was no time to lose.

FALL AND DEATH OF ROBESPIERRE

There is in the manuscript of his Testamentary Discourse a sentence which he crossed out and did not pronounce, but which bears witness to the scorn he felt for his enemies. It reads as follows: "When one considers the nature of their fury, the means they employ, and the end they have in view, one is reminded of the conspiracy of the Pygmies against the Titans. . . ."

He went to the combat alone and unafraid, as becomes a Titan fighting a horde of Pygmies, and he went to his death.

VI

The floor, the galleries, even the corridors were packed. For the first time in many weeks, Robespierre was going to speak at the Convention. He had taken counsel with no one, not even with Saint-Just and Couthon, withdrawing into an isolation that smacked of mysticism.

He was standing now in the orators' tribune, graceful, elegant and outwardly composed. His delicate hands, over which fell the white spray of his lace cuffs, grasped the edges of the pulpit. The frequent blinking of his eyes, and the nervous way his fingers drummed upon the sides of the pulpit, as if playing on a harpsichord, alone betrayed his inner agitation. Before him, in a neat little heap, lay the pages of his manuscript.

Eyes were upon him. The eyes of the gallery, friendly enough, if no longer filled with quite the old enthusiasm; the eyes of deputies, who reserved themselves; the eyes of conspirators, burning with hate and disquiet. He raised his head with the chalk-white hair, and the voice that had ruled the Convention for many months, spoke.

Robespierre's speech—which it took him two hours to deliver—was courageous and at times eloquent. It

made some definite proposals. He wanted the traitors punished, both Committees "purified", the agents of the Committee of General Security—whom he charged with disgraceful conduct—dismissed, and a united government set up under the supreme authority of the Convention. It had, however, serious defects. It was confused and too largely devoted to a discussion of personal grievances. Its greatest defect, however, which was to prove fatal, was that it failed to name those whom he accused, except one, whom he should have left in peace—Cambon. Truly, Robespierre showed more courage than judgment in assailing so many at the same time. Cambon's financial policy has been criticized by others and had serious defects, but he had rendered inestimable services to the Revolution and was as incorruptible as Maximilien himself. When Robespierre said: "The supreme administration of our finances is in the hands of Brissotins, Feuillants, aristocrats, notorious scoundrels: the Cambons, etc.", he committed an injustice which would cost him dearly.

His failure to name—even when challenged to do so—the five or six deputies whom he considered it essential to punish for their misdeeds, was equally serious. His reason may have been that he did not want their death, but merely wished to make them innocuous by keeping them in constant terror. If so, then he greatly miscalculated. They made use of the uncertainty he allowed to float over the Assembly to crystallize the fear and doubt of many of the deputies into a determination to take no chances. "The very bell on your table is guilty", Carrier was to say later to the president of the tribunal that was trying him. So much had happened, such passions had been aroused, that who could say with certainty: "He does not mean me?"

It is, however, surprising that in fixing responsibility

for the excesses of the Terror, the authority of Robespierre's Testamentary Discourse has not been greater. His public repudiation of those excesses—made in the presence of all the interested parties—deserved to be given greater weight. The fact that the repudiation did not meet with denial until after his death makes it appear wellnigh conclusive.

"Is it I", he said "who have thrown patriots into prison and have carried the Terror into every walk of life? Is it I who—while shielding treason and neglecting the crimes of aristocracy—have waged war upon peaceful citizens, magnified into crime private opinion and trifling offence, pretending to see guilt on every hand, until the Revolution has become abhorred by the people itself?

"When the victims of their tyranny would complain, they would excuse themselves by saying: Robespierre wills it; we are not to blame. They said to the nobles: It is he who has proscribed you. To the patriots: He wants to save the nobles. To the priests: He alone persecutes you; without him you would be left in peace and could triumph. To the fanatics: He wants to destroy religion. To patriots whom they persecuted: He has ordered it, or does not want to have it stopped. All manner of complaints were sent to me regarding wrongs I lacked the power to right, and people were told: Your fate depends on him alone. They said: Look at these pitiful condemned! Who is responsible for their fate? Robespierre!—They particularly set out to prove that the Revolutionary Tribunal was a bloody assize created and controlled by me alone, for the purpose of executing both the just and the unjust—for it was considered useful to raise up enemies against me among men both good and evil. Hardly an individual has been arrested, hardly a citizen vexed, but he was told: Behold

the author of your woes! But for him you would be free and happy.—In all the prisons and in all the Departments this plan of attack was followed. It was I who had done everything, required everything, commanded everything, for it should not be forgotten that I bear the title of Dictator.

“I will confine myself to saying that the nature and extent of this calumny—the inability to do good and prevent wrong from being done—have forced me, for the last six weeks, to abandon completely my functions as member of the Committee of Public Safety. Six weeks have passed since my dictatorship is at an end. Is the country happier now? I hope so!

“They call me a tyrant. If I were one, they would crawl at my feet. I would gorge them with gold and permit them to commit crime unhindered, and they would heap gratitude upon me.

“If the reins of the Republic are relaxed even for a moment, military despotism will take possession of them, and we will perish for not having known how to make use of the appointed hour in the destiny of mankind when liberty could have been firmly founded. Without the Revolutionary Government the Republic cannot be made to endure, but when that government falls into perfidious hands, then it becomes itself the instrument of counter-revolution.

“I have not the gift of feigning respect for scoundrels, and even less (in accordance with a royal maxim) of making use of them. I was made to combat crime, not to govern it.

“The weapons of liberty should be wielded only by hands that are clean. I have sometimes feared—I confess it—to become sullied myself by the unclean presence of perverted individuals who have insinuated themselves among the sincere friends of mankind.

"The Departments of the Republic where these crimes have been perpetrated, will they forget them because we have forgotten them? Will the complaints to which we close our ears not find a more forceful echo in the hearts of the oppressed? Guilt unpunished, will it not pursue its way from crime to crime? And if the guilty escape the justice of men, will they escape Eternal Justice, which they have outraged by their horrible excesses?

"No, Chaumette! No, Fouché! Death is not an eternal sleep! Citizens, erase from the tomb this inscription put there by sacrilegious hands, which casts a pall over the face of nature. Engrave rather this upon it: Death is the beginning of immortality."

The immediate effect produced by the speech—of which the above is but a few fragments—was very considerable. When he finished there was a burst of hearty applause from floor and galleries, which was renewed as he walked to his seat. While he did so, Rovère leaned over towards Lecointre and whispered to him to take the floor and read his accusation against the government. Had Lecointre done so, Robespierre would have been saved. The Committees would have struck back, and under their and Robespierre's combined assault the conspiracy would have wilted. Lecointre later gave specious reasons why he did not read the accusation, but the truth appears to have been that he was frightened by the applause Robespierre had received. Considering the battle lost and wanting to curry favour, he got up and moved that Robespierre's speech be printed! This gives the measure of the courage of some of Maximilien's opponents.

Bourdon (of the Oise) showed more daring on this occasion by moving that the speech be referred to the Committees. The wily Barère—ready to range himself

on the side of the apparent victor—supported Le-cointre's motion, saying that light should not be hid under a bushel. Couthon went further and proposed that a copy be sent to every commune. Put, and carried. Victory seemed to be complete.

Vadier in the tribune. He speaks on his favourite subject: Catherine Thécot—and says that his committee has been misrepresented. He gets a little applause. But there is Cambon, justly indignant. "Before I allow myself to be dishonoured, I'll speak to all France!" he says. He makes a vehement defence of his policies. He is respected for his ability and character, and is applauded. The conspirators breathe easier. All is not yet lost. When honest men fall out, thieves fail to get their due. A cross-fire of argument between Cambon and Robespierre. Then Billaud in the tribune. Robespierre had accused him of hypocrisy, making it plain whom he meant without naming him. He would rather, he says, his corpse served as a throne to one consumed with ambition than to be his accomplice by keeping silent. He, too, demands that the speech be referred to the Committees. Robespierre retorts that he did not attack the Committees as a whole. He demands the right to express his opinion. "We all demand that!" cry several voices. The tide has definitely turned.

Panis takes the floor and says he has heard he is one of those Robespierre wishes to have punished. He demands to know if this is true.

ROBESPIERRE: "I have thrown away my buckler and have presented myself uncovered before my enemies. I flatter nobody! Fear nobody! Slander nobody!"

PANIS: "And Fouché?"

ROBESPIERRE (*contemptuously*): "Fouché? I don't want to bother with him now. I have done my duty. Let others do theirs."

Charlier makes a motion that the action taken in regard to the speech be rescinded and it be referred to the Committees for examination.

ROBESPIERRE: "What! I have had the courage to bring to the attention of the Convention truth essential to the welfare of the country, and it is to be referred to those whom I have accused!"

This is received with murmurs. The storm is gathering. Charlier is applauded when he says:

"When one flatters oneself to have the courage of virtue, one should likewise have the courage of truth. Name those you have accused!"

THE CONVENTION: "Yes, name them! Name them!"

Robespierre stands with arms folded and does not reply.

"Name them! Name them!"

His lips remain closed.

Several others take the floor, among them Barère, who, prudent man that he is, moves to neutral. Charlier's motion is put, and carries. Robespierre has lost control of the Convention. But there are the Jacobins. There is the Commune. There is Paris. What will their reaction be?

VII

That evening he went walking with Eleonore in the Champs-Élysées. The dog, Brount, accompanied them. Robespierre did not appear worried, but the girl was silent and thoughtful. There was a gorgeous sunset. He called Eleonore's attention to the blazing sky. "Ah, that means good weather to-morrow", she said.

Later in the evening he went to the Club. News of the happenings at the Convention had spread throughout the city. The hall was packed to overflowing. He

received an enthusiastic reception. In his hour of danger the Club had recovered all its old-time enthusiasm for him.

Billaud-Varenne and Collot d'Herbois were already there. The first had not set foot at the Club for over four months. His presence proved that the Committee knew the battle was not yet over. Robespierre's intransigence had angered, but even more surprised and disappointed his colleagues of the Committee. They realized more than ever the danger of dissension in the government, and would have been glad to make peace with him even now. Towards the end of the meeting at the Club there was a rumour—probably not without some foundation in fact—that Collot d'Herbois had thrown himself at Robespierre's feet and had begged him to become reconciled.

When the meeting had been called to order, Robespierre, Billaud and Collot asked for the floor at the same time. The chair recognized Robespierre. His appearance in the tribune started a fresh demonstration. When the applause had subsided, he said: "Your excitement makes it evident that you already know what has happened at the Convention".

He was urged to repeat his discourse of that day, and having put on his glasses, began. Frequent applause interrupted him. While he read, he again had the feeling that he was nearing the end of his destiny and was occupying that tribune for the last time. When he had finished and the applause had died he shoved his glasses up on his forehead, looked for a moment at the faces raised towards him and gleaming pale in the light of the oil-lamps, and said solemnly:

"What you have just heard is my last will and testament. I have seen it to-day. The league of the evil is too strong and I cannot hope to escape it. I shall die

without regret. I leave you my memory. You will cherish it and defend it."

David cried out: "If you drink the hemlock, I'll drink it with you!" and as Robespierre was just then descending from the tribune, he rushed towards him and embraced him.

Dumas—President of the Revolutionary Tribunal—spoke next, calling the conspirators the heirs of Hébert and Danton and predicting an identical fate for them. But when Collot d'Herbois appeared in the place where Robespierre had stood, emotion and enthusiasm changed into a frenzy of rage and hatred. Powerful as was Collot's voice, he was unable to make himself heard. In vain he reminded them that he had but recently escaped assassination, in vain Billaud-Varenne tried to obtain silence for him. Both were roughly handled and escaped from the hall amidst shouts of: "To the guillotine!"

Payan, Dumas, Coffinhal besought Robespierre to take advantage of the enthusiasm. The rooms where the Committees at this hour were in session were poorly guarded. They would gather soldiers, overpower the guard, place Robespierre's enemies in the government under arrest. The tocsin would sound. To-morrow he could walk into the Convention and speak with the voice of authority. He shook his head. His fatalistic utterance of a little while before had been largely subconscious; consciously he believed there was still hope. That day he had said to Duplay: "The mass of the Convention will listen to me", and he repeated this the following morning. He only wanted the moral support of the Jacobins, nothing more. Yet, even moral support, to be effective, has to be organized. The least the Club should have done was to have declared itself in permanent session. Neither this nor any other measure was taken. The meeting adjourned amidst

cries of "Long live the Republic! Death to traitors!" The Jacobins went home and to bed.

Robespierre, too, went home. He did not confer with Saint-Just, Couthon or Augustin. He had isolated himself not only from the Committees, but even from his staunchest supporters. It is practically certain that he had not previously read his discourse to them. Had he done so, Saint-Just would have pointed out to him its gravest defect. In his undelivered speech of the 9th of Thermidor appears this sentence: "The member who yesterday spoke so long in the tribune seems to me not to have stated with sufficient clearness whom he accused". Saint-Just did not agree with Robespierre's policy. He was for compromise, Robespierre was not. "As for me," he wrote in the above-named speech, "I have no grievance against the Committee. It has left me in peace, as a citizen without pretensions, *who goes his way alone.*"

The last words have a tragical significance. They hint at a disagreement between master and disciple, at the bitterness of disillusion. In the speech he speaks of Robespierre as "irreproachable", but it was his principles, not his tactics, he characterized by that name. And, in truth, Maximilien's tactics at this time leave much to be desired. Perhaps he was right in not accepting a compromise, but in that case his speech was a tactical blunder, and his failure to take any precautionary measures, inexcusable. Even more inexcusable—or excusable only on the theory of mental breakdown—was his failure to consult with his friends, or even to inform them. Only two nights before, we find Couthon saying at the Club that if there had been personal differences between members of the government, they did not differ on matters of principle, and that the personal differences were healed! Robespierre at this time gives

evidence of having lost some of his capacity for leadership. It is evident that his frail constitution had greatly suffered under the strain of five years' struggle and overwork, and that the effect was mental even more than physical.

VIII

The conspirators no less than the Committees knew the battle had only begun. The Convention had reversed itself many times. Under pressure of the Jacobins and the Commune it might do so again. A victory for Robespierre now would be fatal to them. It would make him absolute. It was necessary to follow up their advantage, and to do so quickly, before he was able to collect his forces.

Robespierre, in a speech at the Club, had charged Fouché with being the leader of the conspiracy. There can be no doubt that he was right. It took no mean ability to knit together for united action so many discordant elements, but the man who started his career as a penniless seminary teacher and Socialist, and would end it as one of the wealthiest men in France, and a duke, was born to intrigue. While Robespierre slept, Fouché worked feverishly. First, he set out to convince those in the conspirators' ranks who, like Lecointre, wanted to attack other members of the government besides Robespierre and his two friends, that the attack should be confined to the "Triumvirate". He was on his feet all night. His long, pale, astute face, with the drooping eyelids, that almost hid the eyes from view and gave the features an air of mystery, fascinating and disquieting, was seen that night in the living quarters of many a wavering deputy. To some he proved that Robespierre was a dangerous radical, who would not stop short of the "agrarian law"; to others, that he was

a counter-revolutionist, who had kept Marat out of the Panthéon; to each, that he (the deputy) was unquestionably among those whom Maximilien meant to send before the Revolutionary Tribunal. His principal aids were Tallien—whom Cambon, a little while later, was to call a thief and a sanguinary monster, and whose mistress, Thérèse Cabarrus, was in prison awaiting execution—Barras, Fréron, Rovère, Lecointre and Bourdon (of the Oise).

Not much could be accomplished without the aid of the Right—numerically strongest, but hitherto overawed by the Commune. The conspirators went to see the leaders of the Right, Palasne-Champeaux, Boissy d'Anglas, Durand de Maillane. Robespierre had protected them against these very men and their followers. Without him they probably would not have been alive. Only a little while before, Durand de Maillane had written to him: "My dear colleague, continue to protect the weak. Oh, how great an advantage your disinterestedness, and the glorious independence it confers upon you, gives you over the self-seekers."

So, when the "self-seekers" came to ask for aid against the man of "glorious independence", they got a cold reception. But they were persistent and came again, promising that if they won, the Terror would cease. The leaders of the Right probably thought what is expressed by the old rhyme:

When the devil was sick, the devil a saint would be,
When the devil got well, the *devil a saint* was he.

They decided to take no chances. But then they considered. If Robespierre won, the Terror, no doubt, would be moderated, but the Laws of Ventôse would be strictly enforced, which meant that the whole force of the Terror would be brought to bear upon the

aristocracy and upper bourgeoisie, with a view of permanently destroying their power by expropriating them. And there was no telling if the Laws of Ventôse were not only a beginning; whether he did not have in mind some great nationalization scheme; whether, as he himself had hinted, his opposition to Roux had not been tactical. Had he not said, on the 5th of February of that year: "We want a condition of things under which society will assure the well-being of every individual; under which commerce will be the source of public wealth, not of the monstrous opulence of a few families?"

If, on the other hand, he lost, the back of the Jacobin Republic would be broken, for with him would end the power of the Commune. The way would be open for counter-revolution—for a triumph of the Right! So, when the conspirators came a third time, they were no longer repulsed, but were promised help . . . conditionally. "We will help you if you prove yourselves the stronger", said the careful men of the Right. Thus the Hébertists, the Dantonists and the counter-revolutionists united to overthrow the man who personified an idea.

The following morning, the Dantonist Bourdon (of the Oise) warmly shook the hand of Durand de Mailane in the resounding gallery of the Louvre, and said: "Oh, what fine fellows are these men of the Right!" Maillane smiled awkwardly and a little guiltily and was later seen walking engaged in friendly conversation with one of the most corrupt of the Hébertist pro-consuls—Rovère.

IX

Six weeks before, Robespierre had donned his new azure coat to go to his greatest triumph. On the morn-

ing of the 9th of Thermidor (July 27, 1794), he donned it again, unconsciously accomplishing a symbolical act: he was going to his death. When he was leaving, Duplay expressed concern about his safety. Maximilien reassured him and started on his way towards the Tuileries. He had persuaded himself that what had happened yesterday was only a parliamentary accident, and so it was; but what was to happen that day was the result of a carefully laid plot. He was walking into an ambush.

Fouché was not in the Convention hall. He was taking no chances. He had assigned the principal role to Tallien—that “clown in the tragedy that ended Robespierre’s reign”, as Mercier calls him. The clown that day was to be Vadier, and the star role was to be taken out of Tallien’s hands by Billaud-Varenne, but the outcome was to be all Fouché could have desired.

Robespierre’s friends Saint-Just and Lebas were there. Augustin was in his seat. Couthon was in the conference room of the Committee quarrelling with Carnot, who wanted to issue an order for the arrest of Hanriot. Friendship and a common ideal united these few men, but no mutual understanding, no plan of action. Against Fouché’s carefully laid scheme they meant to pit nothing but their sincerity and oratory. The conspirators paid them the tribute of employing every means to keep them from being heard.

Undoubtedly the Thermidorians were more uneasy than Robespierre. They must have strained their ears for the sound of the tocsin, the thunderous bark of cannon on the Pont-Neuf. What if the Convention were again confronted by serriced ranks of soldiers, by bluff Hanriot on horseback, by the mouth of cannon pointed at the Tuileries? . . . But it was not the same Robespierre the Convention had to deal with, and a

different sort of government Robespierre had to deal with. Then the government, headed by Danton, had been weak, vacillating, half-accomplice, now it was composed of men schooled to action and definitely hostile. Robespierre had prepared so little for action that Hanriot was that morning peacefully lunching with a relative at Saint-Antoine.

Saint-Just—whom the Convention had but recently welcomed as a hero when he had returned from the battle of Fleurus—sat silent and thoughtful. He had been up all night. Seated at a table in the conference room of the Committee he had been writing the speech with which he hoped that day to save the situation. The speech, as we read it, seems so forceful, yet withal so moderate and well-balanced, that had he been able to deliver it, the effect might have been what he had expected. It accused Billaud-Varenne and Collot d'Herbois, but did not ask their removal from the Committee. He wanted them to state their case publicly, and expressed the hope that as a result of mutual explanations better co-operation might prevail among the members of the government. He likewise demanded that six signatures be required to make an order of the Committee valid. This would automatically break up the virtual monopoly on government Billaud, Collot, Carnot and Barère had come to exercise.¹

Seated with Saint-Just in the conference room had been Carnot, Barère, Lindet and Prieur (of the Côte d'Or), themselves busily occupied. Suddenly the door opened, and Collot, Billaud and several members of the Committee of General Security entered noisily.

¹ Lindet and Prieur (of the Côte d'Or) were technicians who occupied themselves little with the actual government, but who, when they did, sided with Robespierre's enemies. Jean-Bon Saint-André and Prieur (of the Marne) were absent on mission.

Saint-Just looked up from his work. He noticed the suppressed excitement and dishevelled condition of the first two. Surmising what had happened, he asked with a touch of irony how things were at the Jacobin Club. Collot, who as an actor had been hissed off the stage, and to whom that evening's experience was like the opening of an old wound, went into a towering rage. He called Saint-Just a child, a coward and a box of apothegms. The young man, who had faced death at the front many times, remained—according to Collot's own testimony—cold as marble. But during the altercation which followed and in which others joined, he had promised to read his speech to his colleagues before delivering it, and even to discard it if it failed to meet with their approval. At five in the morning he had gone home. Since then he had reconsidered. A reconciliation without intervention by the Convention (which might easily have resulted had the speech been read in committee) would leave the situation unchanged, except that as a result of Robespierre's defeat the previous day the latter's position would be greatly weakened. So, instead of returning at ten, as he had promised, Saint-Just, at about noon, sent a note to his colleagues in the conference room. It was a quaint document. "Injustice", it read, "has closed my heart. I am going to lay it open to the Convention."

Collot presided. No sooner had the secretary finished reading the correspondence than Saint-Just was on his feet. Collot was forced to recognize him, and the tall young man walked to the tribune, ascended the steps, unfolded the manuscript on the pulpit before him and began. He had hardly pronounced a few sentences when Tallien—one of a little group of men standing near the door—raised a point of order. Yesterday a member of the government had spoken in his own

name, to-day another was doing so. It was time, he said, to tear aside the curtain.

As Tallien finished speaking, Billaud-Varenne and other members of the government—whom the usher who had brought Saint-Just's note had told that he was about to speak—entered the hall. Billaud, likewise raising a point of order, rushed to the tribune, which Saint-Just yielded up to him. During the fierce parliamentary battle that followed—for over four hours—Saint-Just remained standing at the foot of the tribune, his manuscript in his hand, imperturbable. Too proud-hearted to be disloyal in time of danger, he died for a policy he did not approve and about which he had not been consulted.

So there stood the redoubtable Billaud-Varenne ready to make the deadly onslaught. It has been explained to what extent Maximilien's irascible and dictatorial manner gave him his justification, but Billaud cannot escape serious censure. When in the furious diatribe he delivered he claimed that the Jacobins meant to massacre the Convention, he was arousing passion without regard to truth. Moreover, the very fact that Billaud essentially agreed with Robespierre concerning the aim in view, makes him less excusable than the others in thus sacrificing principle for the sake of a personal grievance. He told of the previous night's happenings at the Club, of the indignities suffered by him and Collot at the hands of some of the audience, and shooting out his arm with dramatic gesture, pointed to a man seated in one of the upper tiers of seats assigned to the Mountain, and shouted: "There is one of them now!"

"Arrest him! Arrest him!" echoed from various parts of the hall, and the man was dragged outside, amidst applause in which the gallery joined. Thus, for the first

advised David to remain away. The painter had got sufficiently over his enthusiasm of the previous evening to follow the advice, and even to deny his friend a day later, and so lived to celebrate the crowning of Josephine by Napoleon, in the well-known painting at the Louvre. Only two days before, Barère had eulogized Robespierre in the Convention. The previous day he had spoken in favour of the printing of his discourse, saying that light should not be hid under a bushel. That night, however, becoming convinced that Robespierre was a lost man, he had apostrophized Saint-Just in the conference room, saying that the "Triumvirate" wished to divide the spoils of the Republic between a child, a cripple and a scoundrel. The "scoundrel", paler even than usual, lips tightly compressed, a deep frown contracting his eyebrows, was standing now to one side of the tribune, mechanically turning an open pocket-knife in his hand. Why did Barère, who always courted the victor, not try to gain the favour of the conspirators by giving him the *coup de grâce* with that effulgent rhetoric of his, so well calculated to raise a lynching to the dignity of an apotheosis of patriotism? Did he remember the many times Robespierre had defended him at the Jacobin Club? Did he consider that the Commune still had to be reckoned with and that one had better be careful? Or was it because in the depth of his soul he admired this man? That he admired him we know from his biographers Carnot and David d'Anger. They quote him as saying in his old age of Robespierre: "We did not understand that man. He was of the stuff great men are made of. Posterity will not deny him that title." David d'Anger says that when he told Barère of his intention to reproduce the features of the most notable figures of the Revolution in medallion form, Barère, confined to his

bed, suddenly raised himself to a sitting posture and said with energy: "Don't forget Robespierre! There was a man without a blemish, noble to the core, a true republican! What caused his downfall was his vanity, his irascibility, his unjustifiable distrust of his colleagues. It was a great misfortune. . . ."

Barère now tried to prevent that misfortune by a speech calculated to appease. He sang the praises of the Committees, but did not pronounce a single word of condemnation of Robespierre, whom he did not even name. He sought to avert a clash with the Commune by proposing that the Mayor and the National Agent of Paris be held responsible for the safety of the Convention. So voted.

It was now time for the comic interlude, which was supplied by Vadier. The old Voltairian spoke at length about the Law of Prairial, which Robespierre the previous day had charged him with misusing. Besides corroborating Billaud's accusation that Robespierre had defended Danton, he cited, as further misdeeds on his part, that he had likewise defended Desmoulins, Chabot and Basire, abandoning them only when he saw that to persist would compromise him. Next, he amused his audience with the star number of his repertoire—Catherine Théot—and with stories about a certain Taschereau, whom, he claimed, Robespierre had set to dog his steps, and who knowing all of Maximilien's speeches by heart was constantly inflicting them upon him. Tallien, who saw that these humorous digressions did not advance matters any, and besides were getting the audience into too jovial a mood (Robespierre himself smiled faintly), stopped the chatter by demanding that the discussion be brought back to the point at issue.

"I'll know perfectly well how to bring it back to

"President of assassins!" he shouted. "For the last time, I demand to be heard!"

"Not until your turn comes," replied Thuriot.

Robespierre again tried to speak. His voice failed him.

"The blood of Danton is choking you!" shouted Garnier, the Dantonist, who had not had the courage to defend Danton, to the man who had that day twice been blamed for having done so.

Robespierre's lip curled contemptuously. He found voice to reply:

"So it is Danton you are trying to avenge? Cowards! Why didn't you defend him then?"

The conspirators had been proceeding by degrees, uncertain how far the Convention would follow. With the exception of Hanriot and Dumas, those whose arrest had been voted were not especially important. When, therefore, an obscure ultra-terrorist, Louchet, now suddenly cried: "I demand the arrest of Robespierre!" there was a moment's consternation. Applause was weak and scattering. But the motion was seconded, and the applause grew louder. Louchet demanded that his motion be put to a vote. The chairman, amidst applause, pronounced it carried. Another terrorist, Lozeau, demanded an indictment, for which he gave as basis that Robespierre had tried to dominate. That too carried. The Convention, evidently, avenged itself for its own past lack of courage. But courage was not altogether absent from what no longer was a deliberative body, but a mob bent on lynching. It was standing upright in the person of a young man, Augustin Robespierre, who said in a firm voice:

"If my brother is guilty, so am I. I share his virtues, I wish likewise to share his fate. I demand that an indictment be voted against me!"

Maximilien protested. He demanded that he be allowed to speak in defence of his brother. As the tumult again drowned his voice, he lost control of himself, apostrophized the chair, the Convention, refused to be silenced. Duval, who edited a paper the ferocity of which was such that it was surnamed *The Tigers' Journal*, demanded to know if one man was going to be allowed to lord it over the Convention. Fréron, he who had wished to drag the Queen through the streets of Paris at the tail of a horse, and whose terroristic activities in Marseilles Robespierre had interrupted, cried: "Ah, how difficult it is to bring down a tyrant!" A motion for the indictment of Augustin was put, and carried amidst shouts of "Long live the Republic!" Again Robespierre's voice pierced through the din:

"The Republic is lost, now that cut-throats have triumphed!"

Louchet proposed that Saint-Just and Couthon be included in the indictment. That too was voted.

One circumstance speaks perhaps louder than any other in Robespierre's favour: men of character were willing to die for him. It cannot be without significance that Danton—a man of magnetic personality—was unable to arouse in the breast of any man the determination to perish himself rather than share responsibility for his death. One man had already asked to share Robespierre's fate, but he was his brother. Now another struggled free from the hands of friends trying to hold him—struggled so fiercely that his coat was torn at back and sleeve. It was Lebas, Elisabeth's young husband.

"I refuse to share the ignominy of this decree!" he shouted. "Arrest me too!"

Lebas was respected and liked by all. None among that body of men has left a more unblemished record.

As Saint-Just's companion on his mission to the armies of the North and the Rhine he had frequently curbed that young zealot's undue severity. Such a challenge as he now flung to what is noblest in man would not have remained unanswered had the Convention not been ruled that day by its worst elements. A few cries of derision was all the reply it now received. For a moment, compassion, like a wraith, hovered about, touching a heart here and there, but in that fierce atmosphere it could not survive, and vanished like mist in the sun's heat. Lebas' indictment was voted.

"The accused to the bar!" howled Fouché's crew, and the Convention echoed: "To the bar! To the bar!"

The chairman told the ushers to execute the order. They looked at each other, at Robespierre, and hesitated, but half believing their own eyes and ears. Lozeau demanded that there be no special privileges. Then Robespierre himself walked to the bar, followed by his friends. They were formally placed under arrest and led from the hall.

x

The Commune was in session. Fleuriot-Lescot, the thirty-three year old Mayor, presided. By his side sat Payan, the twenty-six-year-old National Agent. Word of the arrest of Robespierre and his friends had just reached them. Fleuriot-Lescot rose, much moved, gave the news to the Council, then added:

"It is here the country has been saved on the 10th of August and on the 31st of May. It is here it shall be saved again. Let all members of the Council swear to die at their post!"

The councilmen rose and cried with one voice: "We swear it!" The gallery applauded.

At his trial Fouquier-Tinville testified that dining

that day with Vergne, near the Pont-Rouge, he was startled by the roll of drums. On inquiry he was told that there was a protest meeting of workmen at the harbour against the wage-Maximum. He then remembered that when leaving the court-house he had been accosted by Samson, the executioner, who had told him that there was rioting about the Maximum at the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, through which the tumbrils had to pass on their way to the guillotine. Samson suggested that the execution be postponed to the following day, but the man of the law would not consent. There had likewise been protest meetings that day in front of the City Hall and in other parts of the city. Towards eight in the evening the Commune was, in fact, to issue a proclamation throwing the blame for the low official wage-scale it had announced but a few days previously upon Barère, who had presented the Law of the Maximum to the Convention. It is proof of Robespierre's immense popularity that at the announcement that he was in danger, the workmen of Paris stopped their protesting and their rioting, forgot their grievance against the Commune, and by thousands rushed to his defence.

In the early stages of the insurrection the Commune showed considerable energy. It ordered Hanriot to free the prisoners (whom it eulogized in a proclamation) by armed force. It sent orders to the forty-eight sections to sound the tocsin, assemble their men to the roll of drums and march to the City Hall. It ordered the barriers of the city closed, and declared null and void all orders issued by the Governing Committees of the Convention. Not all of the sections responded, confused by the contradictory orders from the opposing camps. The great bell of Notre-Dame, among others, remained silent. Still, tocsins started pealing and drums

rolling in various parts of the city. The forces set into motion have, so far as the author knows, never been estimated, but they must have been very considerable. His own estimate is that of the nearly 50,000 armed men the sections were able to furnish, some 20,000 presented themselves for Robespierre's defence at some time during the evening, but owing to the lack of preparation not more than half that number were probably on hand at one time. Whatever the number, virtually all historians agree that under an energetic commander the force would have been more than ample to have prevailed over the Convention.

Hanriot, however, lacked the qualities necessary for the task. He could execute precise orders, as he had done the previous year, but when circumstances arose that called for initiative and judgment, he failed utterly. He had, besides, been drinking heavily that day, and if not drunk, was not actually sober. He summoned what mounted gendarmes were in the vicinity (even those accompanying the tumbrils on their mournful way to the guillotine were requisitioned), placed himself at their head and galloped to the Tuileries. Here, with a few aides-de-camp, he swashbucklered his way into the rooms of the Committee of General Security, where the prisoners had been taken. He had, however, no sooner got there than he was set upon by guards and ushers, overpowered, and he and his escort securely tied under the eyes of the men they had come to deliver.

The Commune, on hearing of Hanriot's mishap, was not discouraged. It sent Coffinhal with a considerable force to deliver Hanriot, and its Police Administrators notified the wardens of all city prisons neither to receive nor to deliver any prisoner or communication. Men and cannon were in the meantime arriving from all directions. The aspect of the Place de Grève, in front

of the City Hall, was becoming martial. The General Council of the Commune was in permanent session. An Executive Committee of nine had been elected and was deliberating in an adjoining hall—the Hall of Equality. Dispatch riders came and went. The weather was sultry, and the wail of tocsins and the roll of drums mingled with the occasional far-off rumble of thunder.

The Convention, which had adjourned at five, had met again at seven. It was in session when Collinhal arrived with his armed force. He wasted no time. He posted sentries at all the inner doors, occupied the Place de Carrousel in front of the Tuileries, swung about his artillery to cover the main entrance, and with an adequate number of men plunged, sword in hand, into the rooms of the Committee of General Security. Members of the Committee and clerks fled pell-mell. Gendarmes on guard, far from offering resistance, placed themselves under his command. Robespierre and his colleagues were no longer there, but he freed Hanriot and led him out in triumph.

When Billaud-Varenne announced in the Convention what was happening, consternation spread among the deputies. Lecointre, red and flustered, began distributing cartridges, pistols, miniature bayonets and what not from the arsenal in his pockets. Collot, in the chair, kept repeating: "The hour to die at our post has come!" The spectators in the gallery and on the upper tiers of seats in the hall had, however, no taste for martyrdom and swept towards the exits in such a hurry that the hall was filled with dust.

But the danger was already over. When Hanriot, swearing and blustering, had swung astride a horse, somebody handed him an order from the Executive Committee to direct his forces towards the City Hall. The Committee could, of course, not have known that

at that moment he held the Convention in the hollow of his hand. A far-sighted commander would have disregarded the order, would have arrested the members of both Governing Committees and the ringleaders in the Convention, kept the remainder under the menace of his guns and asked for further orders. But Hanriot was not the man to take such Napoleonic measures. With the enemy in his grasp, and having only to solve the problem what to do with him, he unclasped his hand and let him go. He withdrew the sentries, swung about his cannon, ordered the infantry to shoulder their muskets, the cavalry to turn the heads of their horses, and retired along the quay. Himself not daring to attack, he put his trust in the hope that the Convention likewise would not dare and there would be a compromise.

It must be conceded that the attitude of Robespierre's enemies, at this time, was so little vigorous as to presage such an issue. There is a passage in the report of Courtois concerning the events of the 9th of Thermidor which throws an interesting light upon this. When Hanriot was captured he was led to the room of the Committee of Public Safety. Far from showing any great satisfaction at his capture, the Committee seemed embarrassed. "What do you want us to do?" Billaud-Varenne inquired testily. Barère added: "What do you want, a summary execution?"—"That would be going a little too far", said Billaud-Varenne. Robin (of the Aube), who, with others, had brought in the prisoner, angry at this irresolution, started to leave. Barère ran after him, crying: "Have Hanriot taken back to the Committee of General Security. We are going to get busy on the case."

It was with enthusiasm such as this that the Committee hailed the prisoner whose capture it had demanded "dead or alive"! At that stage of the proceed-

ings little appears to have been needed to ensure the complete triumph of Robespierre and the Commune.

XI

When Hanriot had rushed into the room where Robespierre and his colleagues found themselves, Maximilien had said to him: "Let me go before the Tribunal. I'll know how to defend myself." Having made no preparation for an uprising, he neither expected nor desired one. The man who believed in preparation to the minutest detail, who had seen the roth of August mature slowly, who himself, the previous year, had taken weeks and almost months to put into motion his complicated revolutionary Juggernaut, could hardly have believed in the success of a spontaneous insurrection. Hence he put his trust into something else. The sentiment of the city was for him. His popularity—of which the members of the Committees, in their reply to Lecointre, were to say that it "transcended all bounds"—had suffered a little, but was still very great. There can be no doubt that the Revolutionary Tribunal was favourable to him. The Convention had done its worst and might be ready for a reaction. The Commune and the Jacobins were bound to make themselves felt morally. There were no serious charges against him, and virtually none at all against his colleagues. There was, therefore, every possibility—and even probability—that they would be acquitted. He thought of Marat, paraded through the city on the shoulders of his friends, to the plaudits of the multitude, after his acquittal. He thought of him carried in triumph back to the Convention, of the fact that his indictment had proved but the prelude to the fall of his enemies. If Marat had come back unscathed from the

Revolutionary Tribunal, why not he? His vanity came into play and urged him to the test. With the arrest of Hanriot any haunting idea of successful armed intervention by the Commune must have left him. When, therefore, a little while later, he and his friends were led into an adjoining room, where a meal had been spread out for them, there is good reason to believe that they agreed not to encourage rebellion, but to take their chances with the Tribunal.

When they had eaten, they were sent on their way to various prisons—Maximilien, to the Luxembourg. The warden of that prison appears to have been the only one to obey the order of the Police Administrators: he refused to admit him. This raises the interesting question whether he had not likewise received a secret order to the same effect from the Committee of General Security. The evidence that he did is slender, but the theory appears plausible. The Committee feared what Maximilien hoped: that he would be acquitted. If he remained at large after commitment, he could be charged with evading justice, outlawed and executed without trial. An acquittal of his colleagues would not have displeased the Committees. When Billaud-Varenne had rushed to the tribune, Barère had found time to whisper to him: "Attack only Robespierre, leave Saint-Just and Couthon alone". And, indeed, the charges made against them were trivial. One can, therefore, readily understand why, if such an order was given, it should have been sent to the warden of the Luxembourg prison alone.

When Maximilien arrived at the door of the prison he found two municipal officers awaiting him. They greeted him and asked his guards—two gendarmes and an usher—if they were not ashamed to be taking Robespierre to prison. The guards certainly did not

relish the task, and the warden having refused the prisoner, were quite willing to turn him over to his friends, the municipal officers. The latter invited Maximilien to accompany them to the City Hall, but he would not have it so. He realized the danger of remaining at liberty and asked to be taken to the office of the Police Administrators, adjoining the Mairie on the Quai des Orfèvres.

When he and his escort got there it was about half-past eight in the evening and daylight still lingered. They were greeted with shouts of: "Long live the Republic! Long live Robespierre!" A conference was held, and then the municipal officers were handed a letter for delivery to the Commune. It was signed by the Administrators, but contained this significant sentence: "This is Robespierre's opinion as well as ours". It recommended the following plan of action:

Close the city barriers, if not closed already.

Seize the post office.

Place all newspaper presses under seal.

Place all newspaper editors and the "traitor-deputies" under arrest.

It will be seen from the above that Robespierre, realizing the die was cast, recommended not to remain on the defensive, but to take a vigorous offensive. It was about nine o'clock when the Commune received the letter, and Coffinhal had the Convention securely bottled. Had a dispatch rider been sent to him with the order to arrest the "traitor-deputies", and had it been carried out, the battle would have been won. The term "traitor-deputies" is rather vague, but had the advantage of giving those executing the order a great deal of latitude. Robespierre aimed, therefore, to follow the same tactics he had followed the previous year: to direct

the insurrection without giving the enemy any legal hold upon him. This time, however, the execution proved faulty. None of the recommendations—except that concerning the barriers (a measure already taken)—was carried out.

Augustin, less prudent by nature, raised no objections when two municipal officers and a force of armed men came to deliver him. A little while later we find him addressing the General Council of the Commune, whom he told that not the Convention, but a handful of conspirators, was responsible for the arrests. Fleuriot-Lescot proposed that a delegation be sent to Robespierre to remind him that he belonged to the country and the people, not to himself, and invite him again to come to the City Hall. A delegation of six was appointed and departed forthwith. Some time later it returned with the disappointing news that Robespierre considered it best to remain where he was. The General Council consoled itself with the sight of its two military heroes—Hanriot and Coffinhal—who came to reap plaudits they had not earned.

It was by now ten o'clock and darkness had fallen. The square in front of the City Hall was packed with armed men, horses and cannon, but nobody—least of all Hanriot—knew what to do with them. The policy of the Executive Committee appears to have been to remain on the defensive; but defence did not seem to be badly needed.

The Committee of Public Safety had addressed itself to the sections, whom it forbade to close the barriers, sound the tocsin, send their battalions to the Commune, etc. These measures, nearly all of them negative, had not proved very effective. They served as an excuse for some of the bourgeois sections to withhold their aid, but it is doubtful whether their help would have

been very valuable. The Convention, on reassembling, had taken some positive measures. It appointed Barras to gather forces for its defence, and passed a decree outlawing Robespierre, his colleagues, Hanriot, the Commune and "all the others"—a generous term that gave as wide a latitude as Robespierre's "traitor-deputies".

The author cannot admit that the decree outlawing Robespierre and the Commune had the effect historians would have us believe it had. The decree was voted in the early evening. It had been read by Barras from the steps of the Tuileries to Hanriot's troopers. Yet, in the report of Dulac—a spy for the Committee of Public Safety—we read that at one in the morning, when Couthon arrived at the City Hall, the Place de Grève "was covered with men, bayonets, pikes and cannon". Now, the men who had been with Coffinhal to the Tuileries had heard the decree some four hours earlier. They had, undoubtedly, communicated it to their colleagues on the square. Are we to believe that it did not begin to have its effect upon them until some four to five hours after they had heard it?

It will be objected that the potency of the decree is proved by the fact that when Fleuriot-Lescot read it to the Council, and, wishing to arouse the indignation of the gallery informed it that outsiders present likewise fell under its ban, his words produced somewhat the same effect as the announcement of Coffinhal's coming upon the gallery at the Convention. But spectators are not fighting men. The only effect we know it to have produced on Hanriot's troopers was that they shouted: "If you are outlawed, our cannon are not!" If the Convention had any magical formula that could disperse armies it would have used it against the same Hanriot when it was besieged the previous year.

There were, however, rumours—at that hour wholly unfounded—that the Convention meant to assume the offensive. Armed men were beginning to gather on the Place de Carrousel. When the news reached the Executive Committee, it sent the following curt note to Robespierre:

“The Executive Committee named by the Council has need of your advice. Come immediately.”

Deputies on horseback, accompanied by torch-bearers, were at that moment galloping through the streets, stopping here and there to read the decree that made him an outlaw. He may or may not have known this, but for the first time in his life decided to place himself openly at the head of an insurrection and left for the City Hall.

✓ He and his escort entered the building almost unobserved, and he was ushered into the Hall of Equality, where the Executive Committee was in session. Among those who greeted him were Saint-Just and Lebas, who themselves had just arrived. Lebas' delivery had been accomplished with some difficulty, the warden, for some time, stubbornly refusing to let him go. Robespierre was told that Couthon—faithful, no doubt, to the agreement they had made early in the evening—still refused to come, and he, Augustin and Saint-Just sent him the following letter:

“Couthon, all the patriots are proscribed. The people have risen. It would be equivalent to betraying them not to join the Commune, where we are at present.”

Lebas, who had been supervisor of the School of Mars—the officers' training school, where Robespierre was popular—sent a letter to the commander, Labretèche. He did not ask for the help of the cadets, which was not needed, but warned Labretèche to be on his

guard lest an attempt be made to make use of his charges against the people.

It is not difficult to divine Robespierre's plans. He had wanted to strike quickly, at a time when this could have been done without loss of life, now he had changed his tactics. Neither he nor the Commune seriously expected an attack. Where thousands had answered the Commune's summons, barely a handful heeded the call of the Convention, in spite of the fact that his enemies had stopped at no scruple. Vadier invented a story about a royal seal Robespierre was supposed to be using at the City Hall. Working-class sections were told that it was he who had kept Marat out of the Panthéon, and that he was only biding his time to marry Madame Royale—the King's daughter—and proclaim himself King of the French. "The fear of losing one's head is a powerful stimulus to the imagination", Vadier was to explain later to Cambon. But it was all of no avail. Of the 50,000 armed men of the sections, Barras was able to rake together less than 2000! Robespierre could dispose of at least ten times that number. In what contempt Barras and his armed force were held by him may be judged from the fact that when at about one in the morning a list of sixteen deputies was compiled who were to be arrested, Barras' name was not even included. Robespierre and the Commune were so confident of victory on the morrow that they were taking political rather than military measures. That night, they felt certain, would pass off without incident. In the morning the tocsins would sound again, a vast force would be assembled—sufficiently vast to make all resistance futile—and there would be another 2nd of June.

These calculations were not far wrong. We know from Courtois' report that Barras had no intention of

taking the offensive. At midnight he and Fréron went to the office of the Committee of Public Safety. They found only Billaud-Varenne, stretched upon a mattress, looking moodily into space. They showed him their plans, which, Fréron tells us, were entirely defensive. Billaud knew that Robespierre was at the City Hall directing the insurrection. He knew Maximilien's deliberate method and felt sure he would not attack that night, but would come on the morrow with overwhelming force. He knew the Convention's situation to be desperate and that the only hope lay in Robespierre's deliberateness, the Commune's over-confidence, and a swift surprise attack. He rejected Barras' plans *in toto*.

"You must march on the City Hall", he said tartly. "It should have been invested long ago. You are giving the Commune and Robespierre time to massacre us."

Billaud, evidently, had no faith in the magic power of any decree. He knew that by the morrow the Commune would not be weaker, but stronger, as it had been stronger on the 2nd of June than on the 31st of May.

How great the confidence was at the City Hall may be judged by the following:

At one in the morning, Couthon arrived, in the company of a gendarme. Robespierre had just finished addressing the Council. He embraced Couthon, and went with him and several others to the adjoining hall, where this conversation took place:

COUTHON: "We must write to the armies immediately."

ROBESPIERRE: "In whose name?"

COUTHON: "In the name of the Convention, of course. Is it not where we are? The rest is nothing but a handful of factionists whom the armed force at our disposal will scatter and bring to justice."

ROBESPIERRE (after a moment's reflection, to August-

tin): "My opinion is that we should write in the name of the People of France."

Is this the language of men who despair of their cause? Yet the above conversation took place barely one hour before Robespierre lay stretched on the floor, a bullet in his jaw, and Leonard Bourdon had taken possession of the building and had arrested the entire Council.

Soon after one in the morning the men assembled in front of the City Hall began leaving, singly and in formation. They, like their leaders, were convinced nothing would happen that night. Many had been there since six in the afternoon, had not supped and were tired and hungry. If they were needed to-morrow they would be called, as they had been the previous year, when the action had lasted three days. It seems that the Executive Committee was a little alarmed at the thought of remaining entirely without armed forces during the night, and a few half-hearted efforts were made to hold the men. The façade of the building was lit up and Hanriot had some wine distributed and promised the men pay for their time. But they saw no reason for staying, and demobilization having started spontaneously it was difficult to stop it. Since no action was intended during the night, a capable general, by sending home at midnight—or even sooner—those who had come early, could have kept an adequate force. But Hanriot had only his loyalty to recommend him.

There was, however, no anxiety at the Commune, even when towards two in the morning the square was virtually empty. If the councilmen had thought that there was serious danger—and especially that they had been abandoned by their supporters—they would not have remained in session, but would have fled. They

certainly would have destroyed the tell-tale register on which those present had recorded their names. They knew that on the morrow their forces would be with them again in even greater numbers, and took it for granted that Hanriot had taken elementary precautions against a surprise attack, little likely as such an attack appeared to be.

What is true of the Commune is likewise true of Robespierre and his colleagues. If they had thought their forces were deserting, instead of merely going home for the night, and had considered it essential that they should be held, is it not likely that one or all of them would have gone down into the square to address their followers? A variety of charges has been made against Robespierre and Saint-Just, but it has never been charged that they were nincompoops. They would have been nothing less if they, who knew the power of oratory, would have allowed their forces to slip away without making any attempt to hold them. What! Saint-Just, who had stopped men from fleeing on the battle-field, would not have lifted a finger to stop his whole army from deserting! They were over-confident! The very weakness of their opponents deceived them. They no more expected Barras to take the offensive than he himself expected doing so until Billaud-Varenne showed him at midnight that his only salvation was audacity. More than likely Robespierre thought it not altogether a disadvantage that the men should go home, so they would be fitter on the morrow. He felt he was holding all the cards, and as a matter of fact he did, until treason and an audacious *coup de main* snatched them from him.

Michelet, who, in spite of his romanticism, has such marvellous historical insight, plainly states that he does not believe the desertion theory. He says that if the

Commune had not been taken by surprise and had been able to stand off the enemy until morning, Barras and Leonard Bourdon would have been caught from the rear by the working men of the suburbs, and Robespierre would have been the victor. All the facts as well as common sense support this view.

The famous downpour, which was supposed to have dispersed Robespierre's forces at midnight, cannot be corroborated, and, it is safe to say, never did take place. Why should it have dispersed only Robespierre's forces and not those of the Convention as well? Since when are working men more particular about not getting their clothes spoilt than bourgeois? The story about the midnight rain is, furthermore, in contradiction with Dulac's testimony, which describes the Place de Grève as crowded at one in the morning.

XII

The situation of the government and the Convention was, as has been said, little short of desperate. One might be easily deceived by Tallien's braggadocio about reducing the City Hall to dust, and some of the other valiant language in the Convention, if one did not remember the desperate expedients to which the Thermidorians were forced to resort. Billaud-Varenne, who was in the habit of talking about walking on a volcano, this time stated the situation accurately when he said: "When one is on a volcano, one must act!" It is to his determination to act that the Convention owed its victory.

It should be said, in passing, that Barras had somewhat hesitated before accepting the command. He, like Barère, in his heart admired Robespierre. "Robespierre was no ordinary man", he says in his memoirs,

and gives him credit for saving the lives of many deputies and other citizens, whom the Committees wished to send before the Tribunal. In his old age he was to say to Alexandre Dumas: "I have the double regret—I should say the double remorse—of having overthrown Robespierre on the 9th of Thermidor and raised Bonaparte on the 13th of Vendémiaire".

The Convention had this advantage over the Commune: its supporters from the bourgeois sections began gathering when the Commune's supporters were beginning to get tired and were thinking of going home. Two thousand men is not much in comparison with twenty thousand, but when the twenty thousand are at home in bed, it is quite a few.

Towards two in the morning Barras' scouts informed him that the Commune's forces had demobilized for the night, and that there were only a few armed guards in front of the City Hall. He now divided his force in two columns, one of which he placed under the command of Leonard Bourdon, himself taking charge of the other. With his own column he intended to follow the Rue St. Honoré, cross the Rue St. Denis and the Rue St. Martin, thus arriving in the rear of the City Hall. Bourdon's column was to follow the quay along the Seine.

The column commanded by Bourdon—one of Robespierre's most bitter enemies, and one of the boldest and bravest—was composed partly of gendarmes, partly of men from the section of Gravilliers. This was the section which had been represented at the General Council of the Commune by the anarcho-communist priest Jacques Roux. It was not predominantly a working-class section, like, for example, that of Finistère, from the Faubourg Saint-Monceau, whose men were among the last to go home that night. It was

composed of handicraftsmen, many of them small employers. Now, to avenge Roux, it ranged itself on the side of the Thermidorians.

There are several versions of what happened on the night of the 9th to the 10th of Thermidor. One of the points of controversy is the manner in which Robespierre was wounded. Some great scholars, like Mathiez—who has made the French Revolution, and especially Robespierre, a life study, and has corrected innumerable errors—hold that Robespierre's wound was self-inflicted, the result of an attempt at suicide. The author believes he has overlooked none of the evidence, yet feels compelled to reject the suicide theory. The nature of the wound, the testimony of physicians, make it, in his opinion, untenable.

The testimony of the gendarme Merda, who claims to have shot Robespierre, is highly coloured. He was a nineteen-year-old Gascon, and could hardly have been expected to tell the sober truth about so exciting an event. Merda not only distorts truth, he likewise suppresses it. It is practically unimaginable that he would have dared to shoot so important a man as Robespierre upon his own initiative. The fact that Leonard Bourdon personally introduced him to the Convention as the hero of the night makes it reasonably certain that it was he who armed him and told him what to do. *Unless this were so, would Bourdon not have been sceptical about the Gascon's story?* One can well imagine that the Thermidorians, who that afternoon, when realizing that the city was going to rise, felt embarrassed about what to do with Hanriot, very much preferred taking Robespierre dead than alive.

Leonard Bourdon, then, was advancing along the quay. So great was the confidence at the City Hall, and so amazing the incompetence of Hanriot, that no news

of this reached the Commune, although a good walker can easily cover the distance in fifteen minutes, and a runner in half that time. An aide-de-camp of Hanriot—a certain Ulrick—had betrayed the password of the Robespierrists to the enemy. Bourdon gave Merda the password, and two pistols, which the young man hid in his clothing. He was to go a little distance ahead of the column, gain admission to the building, get into the vicinity of Robespierre and wait. When he heard Bourdon's men rushing in and all was confusion, he was to draw a pistol and kill Robespierre. This would involve comparatively little risk to him.

Merda followed instructions. He had no difficulty getting into the building, and the sentry at the door of the Hall of Equality let him pass. He entered the hall. Some fifty men were standing about, talking. At a table lighted by candelabra, on which writing material lay scattered, Robespierre and several others were seated. Maximilien sat in an armchair, pushed a little away from the table. His legs were crossed, his elbow was on his knee, and he supported his chin with his hand. It was an attitude he often took. Perhaps Barère and Collot d'Herbois remembered him thus when they, the victors so little happy with their victory, told Merda, when he came for his reward: "We owe nothing to an assassin!"

Merda stood about nervously, watching the face of the man he meant to assassinate, and at the same time listening for the noises that would tell him that Bourdon's men had invaded the building. It was not long before he heard cries and the sound of scuffling. The door flew open. . . . Merda quickly pulled a pistol, took a hasty aim at Robespierre's breast and fired. . . .

Robespierre, his lower jaw shattered by the bullet, fell forward upon the floor. All was confusion. Lebas,

standing near him, took a look at his fallen friend, snatched a pistol, placed the muzzle against his own temple, and pulled the trigger. Then, as armed men rushed into the room, Augustin, quickly removing his boots, climbed out of the window on to the cornice. Here he stood for a moment, hesitating, his boots in his hand, then plunged into the square, where he was picked up with a broken thigh. Couthon had been seized by a few of those present, who tried to drag him to safety. When they reached the stairway, somebody stumbled, and Couthon fell headlong, fracturing his skull. One account has it that the giant Coffinhal flung himself in a rage upon Hanriot and hurled him out of the window. By the table, Saint-Just remained standing like a statue.

XIII

Through the dark streets of Paris, Robespierre was borne upon a stretcher from the City Hall to the Tuileries. A crowd walked alongside, and the light of torches cast weird gleams over his prostrate form. Those at the foot end of the stretcher kept reminding those at the head end to hold up his head, so he would not die. When they reached the Tuileries, where the Convention was in permanent session, the crowd became so dense that the bearers had difficulty making their way up the stairs of the building. Deputies came running. "Doesn't he make a fine-looking king?" jeered one.

Charlier, presiding over the Convention, announced:

"The cowardly Robespierre is here. Do you want him brought in?"

"No! No!"

"The corpse of a tyrant can only contaminate the air!" shouted Thuriot, as ungenerous towards his fallen

enemy Robespierre as he had been disloyal to his fallen friend Danton.

The stretcher-bearers pursued their way down the endless corridors towards the audience room of the Committee of General Security. Here they lifted the wounded man on to a long table and placed a deal box, containing some pieces of musty bread, under his head. Thus he lay under the light of the oil lamps, his eyes closed. He had lost his stock and lace jabot, his shirt was stained with blood, his hair in disorder. His coat was torn and stained, and blood-stains were on his nankeen breeches. His stockings had slipped down upon his ankles. He made no sound, and his face was so livid that one might have thought him dead, but that his eyebrows contracted occasionally and he breathed heavily now and then.

His enemies came to feast their eyes upon him, and the basest among them could not refrain from deriding him.

"Your majesty suffers?" asked one.

"It seems you no longer have the floor", said another.

He opened his eyes and looked at them quietly.

Later, he made a movement towards his garter, which seemed to be troubling him. A clerk, touched by pity, hastened to unfasten it for him. "I thank you, *monsieur*," he said softly. It was a term that had gone out of fashion. Did his mind revert to the period before the fall of the King, or did he say it consciously, in bitter realization that the Jacobin Republic—the Republic of Equals—had ceased to exist?

Saint-Just, Payan and Dumas were brought in. As the table on which Robespierre lay was entirely surrounded by the malignant or morbidly curious, they could not see him. "Stand aside and let them see their

king resting on a table like any ordinary mortal," said a deputy, and an opening was made. Saint-Just looked at his friend. His eyes alone, which were red and swollen, betrayed his emotion. He did not utter a word. Payan, as young as he, smiled a bitter little smile. This was their leader. Their cause—so nearly victorious—was lost, for a hundred years or more. . . .

As blood kept dripping from Robespierre's wound, somebody handed him a soft leather pistol holster. Now and then he applied it to his cheek, trying to staunch the flow. It was soon saturated, and a clerk took it and gave him some sheets of white paper instead. It was then noticed that the holster bore the following inscription:

"At the Great Monarch, Lecourt, Furnisher to the King and his Armies, Rue Saint-Honoré, near that of Poulies, in Paris."

This accorded too well with Vadier's story of the royal seal, and with the gibes, to permit us to think that he who handed him the holster was actuated by charity.

Finally, daylight came, and with it Elie Lacoste, of the Committee of General Security, accompanied by a health officer and a military surgeon. "Bandage him well", said Lacoste, "so he will be in condition to undergo his punishment". The surgeon raised the wounded man to a sitting posture, washed the gore from his face, put some lint into his mouth to absorb the blood, removed broken teeth and splintered bone, and dressed the wound. During the operation, which was exceedingly painful, not a moan escaped the prisoner, but he kept his eyes fixed upon the two men with burning intensity. In their report they state that "the monster" was "apparently tranquil". As they tied a wide bandage about his head, the gibes began again:

"They are putting on His Majesty's diadem".

"Now he is wearing a nun's hood".

It was about six in the morning when the surgeon finished his task and left him. The hours crept by. Fresh spectators kept arriving, fresh gibes met his ear. If doubt entered his mind whether he himself was the Titan he had thought he was, he could not have doubted that those about him were Pygmies. Perhaps now and then he saw a face that—not too openly—expressed grief and sympathy. He knew that he was going to die, and as he lay there with eyes half closed, the hard deal box for a pillow, his mind probably went over incidents in his career. He must have walked again the quaint streets of Arras, seen the Abbey of Saint-Waast, the faces of people he had known in childhood. He must have lived again the tumultuous scenes of the Revolution, the sound of the tocsin must have been in his ears, and—like the shadow of a mountain peak lying over a landscape—the spectre of Doctor Guillotin's terrible machine must have haunted his thoughts. But he had consecrated himself to death and was not afraid, and perhaps his parched lips murmured again what he had said at the Convention but a few short weeks before, to the thunderous applause of floor and gallery that rose to acclaim him: "I have lived enough!"

Towards ten a stretcher was brought, and he and Couthon were carried under strong guard to the Conciergerie, where he was locked up in the cell adjoining the one Marie Antoinette had occupied. The Committee of Public Safety had specified that the guard should be adequate. Did it fear an attempt to liberate him? It need have had no fear. The sections were stunned. And now when there was no leadership and the risk was considerable, the thought of the wage-Maximum came to re-enforce their reluctance to expose themselves. The workmen consoled themselves with

the thought that the councilmen who had wished to enforce the hated law must now suffer. Some, when the councilmen were led to the scaffold, came to taunt them with it.

The Convention, in the meantime, was receiving the homage cowardice always keeps in reserve for the victor. The officers of the Department—who as late as ten o'clock the previous night had asked for instructions from the Commune—came to assure the Assembly of their loyalty. The Revolutionary Tribunal, whose president, Dumas, was one of the prisoners, apologized for the disloyalty of some of its members. Fouquier-Tinville came, and declared himself legally puzzled. Before an outlaw could be executed, his identity had to be established by two municipal officers. The municipal officers all being outlawed themselves, he was in a quandary. Thuriot grew angry. Were they going to be done with all this nonsense and proceed "to purge the soil of the Republic of a monster that had been about to proclaim itself king"? They solved the legal tangle by appointing commissioners that would give the law a suitable substitute for what it considered its due.

XIV

Towards five in the afternoon of the 10th of Thermidor (July 28, 1794), the tumbrils drew up in the court of the Conciergerie. For some time now the executions had been taking place at the Trône barrier, beyond the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, but for this special occasion the guillotine had been hastily re-erected on the Place de la Révolution. A total of 105 men were to pay with their lives their rebellion against the government. That day, however, only the principal leaders—twenty-two in number—were to be executed. Of those who

had played an important role only Coffinhal was missing. He had escaped, but would be captured and beheaded a few days later.

In the first tumbrils were placed Maximilien, Augustin, Hanriot, Saint-Just and Couthon. Augustin and Couthon were in a moribund condition. Outside, on the Quai de l'Horloge, a crowd had gathered—the riff-raff of the city, the same that hurled insults at all the condemned, no matter what their political convictions, but also members of the bourgeoisie and their offspring—the future *Incroyables* and *Merveilleuses*.

As the tumbrils issued upon the quay, hoots and jeers greeted them. The mounted gendarmes, with showman's gusto, pointed out the coryphées with their swords. An hour before he was wounded, Robespierre had shaken the hand of the gendarme who had brought Couthon from prison, and had said: "Honest fellow, I've always liked and respected your branch of the service".

Thus, amidst hoots and jeers, the tumbrils started on their way over the Pont-Neuf, down the Rue du Roule, down the long Rue St. Honoré. Fabulous sums are reported to have been paid for window space, and elegantly dressed men and women ("a better class of persons", says the English historian Wilson Croker) graced the windows with their presence and filled the streets, shouting lustily: "To the guillotine!" The working men, whose imprudence and the incompetence of some of whose leaders had brought on this disaster to their cause, remained indoors. The faubourgs were sullen, but did not stir.

When the tumbrils reached the house of Duplay in the Rue St. Honoré, they stopped, thanks to some official's appreciation of the refinements of cruelty. All those inhabiting it, except Eleonore and her sister

Victoria, were in prison. Robespierre remembered how he had ordered the *porte-cochère* to be closed and the windows shuttered when Louis XVI had gone on the same journey, and again when his former friends Danton and Desmoulins had passed on their way to the guillotine. "It is better to make one's living as a poor fisherman than to govern men", Danton was reported to have said, and perhaps some such thought now haunted Robespierre's brain.

Harpies had taken each other by the hand and were executing a witches' dance about the tumbril, encouraged and applauded by the "better class of persons" looking on from their high-priced points of vantage, as from boxes in a theatre. He who had defended the people even in its excesses, because he knew the excesses of wealth and power, looked on quietly. The word *canaille* did not fall from his lips, as it had from those of Danton.

A child carrying a pailful of ox's blood and a whisk broom now approached the house, and dipping the broom into the liquid gore, sprinkled it upon the wall, while the crowd howled its approval. He closed his eyes and a slight tremor passed through him. And this was the weird and puzzling contradiction of the scene, that the man who howled loudest "Down with the tyrant!" and lifted a hate-distorted face towards him, was none other than Carrier—Carrier of the *noyades*, whom he had been instrumental in recalling for shedding blood wantonly, and would have punished but for the protection extended to him by two of the principal Thermidorians, Billaud-Varenne and Collot d'Herbois!

The tumbrils creaked onward again, and now a well-dressed woman clutched at the railing of the one in which he was seated, and screeched: "Go down to hell, scoundrel, laden with the curses of wives and mothers!"

He remembered that it was he who had tried to stop the nation from going to war, that if he had held the reins of the Republic firmly, it was to keep them from falling into the hands of a military despotism—such a despotism as later, at the single battle of the Moskowa, was to sacrifice forty times as many lives as were snuffed out in Paris during the entire Reign of Terror—and remembering this, he felt justified in his conscience and merely shrugged his shoulders.

Finally, the procession reached the huge square, in the centre of which the guillotine was guarded by the cadets whose help, less than twenty-four hours ago, he had not thought he would need, so strong he had felt himself. The executioner, Samson, who was a royalist, was waiting with his helpers, and if his brutish brain had been capable of understanding what a Cambon later sorrowfully acknowledged he had failed to grasp, he would have found particular reason for rejoicing, for he was going to behead the Republic.

Robespierre was the last but one to die. He saw his brother and Couthon carried barely conscious up the steps to the scaffold; he saw for a moment Saint-Just standing tall, disdainful, splendid. Danton had said some memorable things at his death, Saint-Just did better: he died like de Vigny's wolf (*"Seul le silence est grand, tout le reste est faiblesse"*). Finally, Robespierre climbed to the platform, unaided and with firm step. A murmur rose from the crowd. Samson, with huge fist, took hold of the bandage that tied Robespierre's shattered jaw, and tore it away so brutally that in spite of his stoicism a cry escaped him. The next moment he was tied to the plank. The knife fell. The Revolution was over.

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